

GONE NORTH

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER



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Feb 1955

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CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

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THE WAY OF THE BUFFALO
WEST

GONE NORTH

BY CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER



GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

1930

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

FIRST EDITION

GONE NORTH

Chapter I

STANDING at the edge of the rotting wharf at Grand Marias, Jim Fallon filled his lungs with the sweet aroma of pine and spruce and cedar. East and west were long timbered shore lines stretching into the Northland, and at his feet were the chopping blue waters of Lake Winnipeg. Lashed to the edge of the wharf was the little wood-burning steamer that was to take him northward to Ross Island. His luggage was aboard and he was idling until sailing time.

The cities of the States were behind Fallon. They were now as remote as the memories he had of them. They had almost stifled him, and now he leaned against the steady breeze that swept down upon him from the Northland and felt new strength flowing into his muscular body. He drew his breath deeply and his blue eyes were eager.

On the steamer from Duluth to Port Arthur he had first scented the Northern wilderness, and it was then that he had felt the strange stirring of the pulsing blood that had been dormant since he had "gone out" more than a year ago. The primitive exaltation had grown upon him while traveling by train from Port Arthur to Saint Boniface, and had finally developed into grim impatience. From Selkirk to Grand Marias he had sat looking out of one of the car windows, staring at the landscape.

Twice he had turned and glanced across the car at the scenes that flitted past the windows on the opposite side, and upon both occasions he had been aware of a young woman who was sitting in a seat across the aisle from him. He had not looked directly at her but his inclusive glances out of the window had reflected her image. He had looked straight at her once, only. That was when at Saint Boniface she had been walking down the station platform toward him.

She was pretty. The graceful lines of her figure were seductively emphasized by the short skirt she wore, by the light leather leggings and the tight-fitting, lightweight checkered mackinaw. When he had got his first glimpse of her daylight had not yet come, and in the dull blaze of the trainmen's lanterns her hair had shone duskily golden. Her red-and-white stocking cap was hanging over her shoulder, and she had walked jauntily, with a free, swinging movement of the hips.

Just before she boarded the car her gaze met Fallon's momentarily. But in that moment Fallon had caught in her eyes a glint of defiance which somewhat mystified him but which left him feeling slightly derisive.

He did not bother to wonder what her look had meant, nor did he particularly care. Women were women. If a man wanted them, well and good. If he didn't want them, that was his business. He had no time or inclination to bother himself about this one. She was good-looking, but there were other good-looking women, and if this one thought his glance at her meant anything except casual interest in a fellow traveler she was mistaken.

However, he had been conscious that for many miles

he had been subjected to the woman's guarded scrutiny, but he had felt no sort of emotion over that knowledge, except perhaps a keener edge of derision. He did not know the woman and was reasonably certain she did not know him; and if she was regarding him in the hope of his attempting to catch her at it she was wasting her time, for he had never had any enthusiasm over women who made a practice of hunting men. He did his own hunting, among women as well as in the wilderness fastnesses, and his fancy might lead him anywhere.

He had spent some years of his youth in the West of the States—New Mexico, Arizona, Texas. He had punched cows in Wyoming and Montana; he had hunted gold in California and the Yukon, and as yet no pretty face had stirred in him more than a passing interest. An adventurer of the trails, he had been on the move for the greater part of his thirty years, questing gold if mayhap fortune smiled upon him, but feeling no disappointment if his travels netted him nothing more than enjoyment of his wild and carefree life.

He had not spoken to the woman who had been with him on the train. Nor had he spoken to her when a few minutes ago he had passed her at the farther end of the wharf. He had pretended not to see her, but he had been aware that her gaze had followed him.

She had looked directly at him when the train had stopped at the little platform at Grand Marias and he had stepped aside to permit her to pass down the aisle to the door of the coach. It was the second time their eyes had met, and this time his gaze was sharp and searching. He was rewarded with all the unmistakable signs of hostility that a woman knows so well how to

employ. Had she been afraid that he might speak to her, might accost her? If that were the case he would set her apprehensions at rest. Knowing that she was at the far end of the platform, watching him, he deliberately turned his back to her and devoted his attention to a scrutiny of the country in the vicinity of the wharf. Timber; tundra with its rank growth of lichen and mosses; muskeg belts with their tall spears of marsh reeds; rolling hills and ridges; and an all-pervading atmosphere of somewhat mournful solemnity. It was enough to satisfy him. Space and silence, with adventure always lurking beyond the crest of the next ridge of land.

He heard a light step on the wharf behind him and he knew the woman was approaching. Anticipating that she would move past him, he walked slowly to the very edge of the wharf and stood with his back toward her looking down at the water that gently lapped the piling. He was amazed and amused when the woman stepped to within a few feet of him and spoke.

"It *is* rather pretty, isn't it?"

Remembering her previous hostility, he glanced around curiously, certain that she had been speaking to someone near him. But the woman and himself were the only occupants of the wharf.

He looked at her, doffed his cap, and agreed with her that the country was pretty.

She had passed her girlhood. Her complexion, the firmly rounded chin and throat, the mass of dusky golden hair, had misled him. Her eyes betrayed her. Ingenuous as she sought to make them, they did not quite succeed in creating in him the illusion that their owner was a frank, candid, guileless girl. Experience,

sophistication, knowledge lurked in their depths. And although Fallon was a gallant gentleman even with women he did not respect, there was a glint of cynicism in his eyes as he met her gaze.

"Is it always this pretty?" she asked. She was looking at his broad shoulders as she spoke and he got the impression that she was estimating his physical strength. Why?

"Not always," he answered. "Not in the fall or the winter or the early spring. Just now it is in a gracious mood. It is like a woman's smile—not to be depended upon."

"My! I thought all sons of the wilderness were gallant! I find you are cynical. Has some woman embittered you? Tell me!"

"You should know women," he said. "Wouldn't you say most women are capricious? A man does nothing and receives a hostile glance. He does still less and is favored with a smile. This country is like that. It has its moods. It is pleasant, gracious, seductive, hostile, and merciless in turn. Can you explain that?"

"Yes. You watched me and I was annoyed."

"A casual glance, madam."

"There was something in the way you looked at me. You have cold, searching eyes, sir. It was as if you suspected me of something."

"Pretty women are scarce in this section," he said, smiling a little.

Her eyes sparkled at the compliment.

"Then you know this country," she said. "You have been here before!"

"No."

He looked past her at the long, low rambling frame building which was used as a railway and steamboat station, storage house, freight depot. Boxes, crates, canoes, bales of goods, fishing nets, and poles were piled here and there in bundles, mounds, and monuments. Above the building flew the red cross and caribou flag of a trading post. From the door issued the indescribable odor of blending aromas from numerous unpacked food supplies. And in the doorway, which was wide and low, were two men who had ridden from Saint Boniface with the woman and Fallon. They had followed her into the train at Saint Boniface, and several times he had seen them together, talking. He had assumed they were friends, and now he was wondering why the woman did not join them instead of forcing herself upon him. As Fallon glanced at them they were joined by the post trader, a squat, broad Scotsman in his shirt sleeves. He was hatless and was smoking a short-stemmed pipe.

The post trader was talking with one of the two men. The other, big, broad of shoulder, and slender of waist, with arms and thighs so muscular that they bulged the sleeves of his mackinaw and the legs of his trousers, was leaning against the edge of the doorway, apart from the trader and the first man. His arms were folded over his chest and he appeared to be staring at the planks of the wharf. But Fallon observed that he was in reality watching the girl and himself.

"You are the sort of man that likes adventure," she said.

Fallon looked again at the big man in the doorway and his lips curved slightly with contempt. The woman did not see the smile.

She added: "Are you going far?"

"How far is far?" said Fallon. He knew that if the two men and the woman were taking the steamer they would be aware when he left it. And so there was little to be gained by lying.

"Not far," he added. "I leave the steamer at Ross Island. After that I don't know. I have no plans beyond Ross Island. I may spend a month or two in that vicinity. I may come south again and go out. I am restless."

The woman seemed disappointed, and now Fallon's growing conviction was strengthened. The hostility she had exhibited on the train and on the platform at Saint Boniface had been real, and her present interest in his movements was provoked by a subtle purpose.

"Just restless," she said. "With nothing to do but roam the world. How fortunate! But of course you are not a mere idler. You must have a profession."

Fallon smiled straight into her eyes.

"Explorer," he said. And his smile broadened when she frowned.

But she looked up instantly, smiling artlessly.

"I think you must be romancing," she said. "An explorer would have boats and—and things. Something that would be called an 'outfit,' I think. You have very little luggage."

"I travel light, ma'am. There will be a guide and a canoe at Ross Island."

It would be useless to lie about the guide and the canoe. She would see both at Rossville, where he would land. And undoubtedly, since she and the two men were interested in his movements, they would linger at Rossville to watch him.

"Have you friends at Ross Island?"

"Not a friend that I know of."

The woman smiled, and Fallon could see that she was vexed by his evasion of her questions, and perhaps by the fact that she was making no impression upon him. He had a feeling that she had expected him to lose his head and become confidential.

He might now have asked her some questions, since she had invited them by asking some of her own, but he resisted the impulse because to exhibit curiosity would imply interest in her. If she and the men were what he thought they were he could conduct his work more successfully by counterfeiting disinterest in their movements and by convincing them that his presence in the wilderness was purposeless.

The woman tapped the wharf with a small booted foot, and Fallon thought she was through with him. But no. She looked up at him again.

"They have some strange tales and legends in this country," she said. "I have heard several. Tales of great wolves—from the Barrens, I think; tribal superstitions that seem very ridiculous; stories of travelers that have disappeared; of fabulous mines that exist only until they are searched for. How do you account for such tales?"

"I don't attempt to account for them."

"Does that mean you do not believe them?"

"I do not believe all of them."

"Ah! You do believe some of them! Well, let us see how credulous you are. Coming up here on the train I was told a story about a gold mine so rich that it would make Midas envious. Do you think there is gold in this part of the country?"

"There are always rumors. I know of no great gold discoveries in this part of the country. Midas, eh? Well, Midas went out of business after the Yukon."

"You have been in the Yukon country?"

She had tried so carefully to conceal her eagerness.

He answered dryly: "A great many people were there."

"But you?"

He lied, shaking his head negatively.

She made a great effort to conceal her chagrin. It was evident to Fallon that she was aware that he was deliberately returning evasive answers to her questions. Yet presently she succeeded in masking her feelings and smiled brightly at him.

"Perhaps I shall see you again, on the steamer," she said. "We are going to Ross Island, too."

She turned, left him.

Fallon walked to the farther end of the wharf. He was no longer amused. He saw the woman join the two men who had been standing in the doorway of the trading post; observed that the three walked slowly away from the building, the woman between the two men. He wondered at the awkwardness of their methods. There had been no depth, no subtlety, in their attempts to discover his errand. Obviously, they were novices.

But there was earnestness in their manner, the tension of passion. They went to the end of the wharf, away from Fallon. There they paused, and the big man spoke to the woman. His voice was eager, vibrant.

"Well?" he said.

The woman's eyes were flashing with impotent rage.

She clenched her hands and stood rigid. Her voice was harsh.

"It's no use," she told the two men, although she looked straight at the big one. "I couldn't get a thing out of him. Not a damned thing!"

"Not a word, eh?" said the big man. He grinned wryly and his lips curved back from his teeth. "Well, what did I tell you? It was a mistake to try to quiz him at all. We've put him next now. Ever since we spotted him at Saint Boniface I've been trying to place him. I've got him now. It was the last grin he gave you. I'd seen it before. I saw it on his lips one night in a saloon in Dawson, when he made a gambler eat his gun. He's Jim Fallon!"

The other man started; his muscles seemed to leap and writhe. Then, his face paling, he stared disgustedly into the faces of his companions.

"Hell!" he cursed. "What a break! Another six months with no interference, and we'd have made the grade. If that man is all I've heard he is I'd rather have an imp from hell on my trail!"

"He's all you've ever heard about him, and more" said the big man. "We're in for it!"

He drew a deep breath. His lips settled into straight lines. The three turned their faces toward Fallon, who was moving slowly along the wharf, apparently unaware of their interest in him.

Chapter II

THE little steamer was a flat-bottomed freighter, and there were no passengers aboard except the two men and the woman and Fallon when shortly before midnight she slipped away from the wharf and turned her prow northward to buck a stiff, quartering headwind.

Fallon's fellow passengers were not to be seen when he went aboard, and for an hour or so he sat in a deck chair on the leeward side and smoked while he listened to the swishing of the water against the bows and watched a white, brilliant moon rise and bathe the world with its magic, silver light.

The shore line slipped by. Beyond it stretched the wilderness, serene and calm, masking its dangers and hazards with the soft, hazy veil of distance. The solitude of the shore line was minimized by the greater and vaster stretches of wilderness that reached beyond it. Bogs, rolling tundra, forests of spruce, cedar, and fir, ridges and swells, rivers and lakes shimmering in the moonlight, fringed with wolf-willow and marsh reeds, stretching and spreading in the weird and ghostly silence into distances too remote for the imagination to comprehend.

An empire of the Wild. An atmosphere that seems to carry the burdens of eternity, that crushes the spirit of

the weakling until he shudders and cringes from it, and teaches even the courageous that the brooding, whispering menace that presses in upon him from all sides is an inarticulate and invisible force trying to impress upon him the finity of man. It is the way the Wild commands the respect of all who enter it.

Fallon had been taught that respect in a grimmer and sterner country—in the far Northwest where to the hazards of forest and stream and barren plain are added the blighting terrors of the outer cold.

This was the first time that Fallon had visited the Hudson Bay country, but from fellow travelers and adventurers on the rim of the Arctic Circle he had listened to tales that he had remembered, and in the office of a mining company in Montana he had listened to still another tale—a tale that was unforgettable for the reason that weaving through it was a father's concern and affection for a son.

While in California word had reached him that William J. Underhill of Montana, mine owner and millionaire, was in need of his services, and when he wired for confirmation he received a reply that set him to packing immediately. Two days later he stood in the presence of the mine owner and listened to the tale.

Underhill was owner of a large tract of timberland along the Hayes River near Hudson Bay. Almost a year before he had sent his only son, Linton Underhill, into the country.

"Lin wanted to go," said Underhill. "He was twenty-five and had settled down. I bought the timber, intending to some day put a pulp mill in there. Lin was an engineer. I wanted him to look the place over and sort

of give me an idea—a general idea—of what could be done up there when we got ready.

“He wrote me from Selkirk that he had bought an outfit and engaged a guide. The guide was a Chippewa Indian named ‘Jackwoon.’ Lin was starting right away. That was about a year ago.

“I didn’t hear from him again. At first I didn’t worry because I thought he had maybe got into the wilderness and couldn’t get to a post where he could get a letter out. But after he had been gone about six months I made some inquiries about him. The day my letter reached the post trader at Selkirk the trader got word that the Indian guide had reported that Lin had disappeared.

“I’ve had a report from the police up there. Jackwoon couldn’t account for Lin’s disappearance. Lin had simply vanished. He’d left a note for Jackwoon at a camp they had on the Shamattawa River near Merry Lake. I’ve got the note here.”

He showed Fallon a piece of paper upon which was written, in pencil, the words:

Jack; I am going north for a few days. Wait.

“There was no signature. But that’s Lin’s writing,” resumed Underhill. “Naturally, there being only himself and the guide, he wouldn’t bother to sign the note.

“Jackwoon told the police he had waited at the camp for two weeks, and when Lin didn’t show up he worked back to the Hayes, trying to trail him. He couldn’t find any trace of Lin.

“There’s a man named Randall up there. He has built

himself a big stone house in the wilderness north of the Hayes. He's a crank, sort of, I think. He must be, to build a house up there. He's wealthy. I've heard a great deal about him but I've never met him. I understand he has a family: a wife and a couple of children. He has big timber holdings north of the Hayes. The police reported that Randall had helped to search for Lin. He hired several outfits of Indian guides and runners to comb the country.

"Now that's all I can tell you. The police and Randall and Lin's guide, Jackwoon, seem to have done all that can be done. But I am not satisfied. I feel that if I don't keep on trying to find Lin I won't be doing my duty as a father.

"And so I sent for you. If there's any man in the world who can find Lin, alive or dead, you are the man. Brave men, men who do not know what defeat is, have recommended you. I wanted to have the best.

"Fallon, it isn't a question of money with you, I know, for you've all you need of that. I am told you take long chances because you like to match your wits and your courage and your muscle with and against conditions that seem to promise certain defeat.

"If I was thirty years younger I'd go up there myself. But I'm not the man I used to be. If you go I know you will put into your efforts the spirit I would put into mine. And man, if you find Lin you can have anything I've got!

"Now don't answer right away. Take a day or two to think it over. I know it's asking more than one man should ask of another, and I won't blame you a bit for refusing. But don't decide now, Fallon."

"I'm leaving to-night," was Fallon's reply. "I've wanted to take a look at that country anyway, and this is as good a reason for going as any I can think of. But don't expect too much of me, Underhill. I'm vastly over-rated. I've been lucky in pulling off three or four things that seemed to be difficult, to outsiders. They were actually rather simple. I'll go up there, but I won't promise how long I'll stay or what I shall do."

That conversation had taken place a little more than two weeks ago. In a pocket of Fallon's coat was a picture of Lin Underhill and the note he had written to Jackwoon, the guide. The elder Underhill had wired Angus Mackenzie, the post trader at Grand Marias, to send Indian runners into the wilderness to search for Jackwoon and bring him back to Rossville to meet Fallon there.

Fallon knocked the ashes from his pipe and refilled it.

When he had been listening to Underhill in the latter's office in Montana he had been convinced that he was setting out on a hopeless quest. Linton Underhill had done a foolish thing in deserting his guide. The solution of the tragedy appeared to be simple. Lin had got lost in the wilderness or had died of starvation. Or he had been attacked by wild animals. Or he had encountered one of the many savage, nomadic tribes of Indians that roam the Northland, and had been murdered. Or he had wandered into the muskeg to drown. There were many other ways in which a man might lose his life. A false step, a sudden illness, insanity.

But now Fallon was revising his convictions, for he knew that his meeting with the woman had not been casual or accidental. Her action in accosting him had

been deliberate and her questioning premeditated. Undoubtedly she had acted under the direction of the two men who had been standing in the doorway of the trading-post building with Angus Mackenzie. The big man, Fallon was certain, was the force and the intelligence which had urged the meeting.

Fallon's lips curved cynically around the stem of his pipe. The big man's intelligence was not amazingly keen or he would have known that the woman's questions would bring her instantly under suspicion—conceding Fallon was involved in what they considered their affairs.

Their methods had been awkward and obvious. He was aware that the three were now speculating about him. It was even possible that they had received some intimation as to the purpose of his visit to this country. Or they might have been advised that Underhill purposed having another search made and their advisor had not revealed the identity of the searcher.

But why should they be concerned over such a search? Why should they have any interest in him at all? What were they afraid of? And were they hostile toward him because they believed he had come to interfere in some project they had evolved? Was this a case of mistaken identity? Was Lin Underhill alive and held prisoner somewhere in the North country? If so, what reason could anyone have for holding him in captivity? The elder Underhill had offered no reward for Lin, nor had he received a demand for ransom. And if Lin was dead there was no reason why anyone, excepting his father, should have any further interest in him.

These questions all received Fallon's attention, but he could provide no answers to them.

And now, having knocked the ashes from his pipe, he remembered that the woman had mentioned a gold mine. "A gold mine so rich that it would make Midas envious," she had said.

Was that the explanation of their strange conduct? Had they discovered a mine which they were afraid he had come north to claim?

That was possible, of course, because gold is where it is found. If they had found gold and thought he was after it, of course the woman would be hostile toward him, and suspicious. And of course, since he was going north on the boat, they would be anxious to know something about his plans.

That very likely was the explanation. Well; they would be relieved when they saw him leave the boat at Rossville and head eastward through the chain of lakes that led to the Hayes.

He got up and leaned against the rail while he watched the moonlight gleaming upon the water. As he put his pipe into a pocket he observed a shadow on the surface of the water and realized that it was past midnight. The moon was behind him, and the moonlight was so bright that he could even see the reflection of the boat's rail half a dozen feet out from the side.

And then, still gazing into the water, he saw another shadow join his on the surface—the shadow of a big man with broad shoulders.

He did not turn; he gave no sign that he knew the big man had come close to him. But when he saw an arm

upraised in the shadow on the surface of the water he moved like a flash to the right and heard a club smash to splinters on the rail at the exact spot where his head would have been if he had not moved.

The weight of his body was on his toes as he ducked and slipped away. His lithe muscles were rippling with eagerness. He heard the shattered club splash into the water, and he saw the big man of the Grand Marias wharf plunge against the rail, momentarily off balance as a result of missing the blow he had aimed at the elusive target. There was an instant when the big man stood erect, amazed and uncertain. And in that instant Fallon flashed forward and swung his right arm in a full arc, pivoting in order to get into the blow the leverage of his body.

The fist landed with a splintering crash not unlike that which had been made by the club striking the rail, and the big man reeled backward with sagging knees.

Fallon was after him, relentlessly. The thud and jar of the blows that landed on the big man's face could be heard above the throbbing of the engine. He was knocked hither and yon until he landed against the rail. He struck the rail with his hips. If he had been conscious he might now have grasped the rail and saved himself from the disaster that followed. But his body was limp and his brain deadened, and so he toppled backward and slid with a heavy splash into the water.

As he fell another figure launched itself from the shadows of the deck house. It was not a club, but a knife, this time. For the blade rang on the deck as the man reeled along the rail from the effect of Fallon's smashing blow. This man was smaller than the first,

and only one blow was necessary. He fell, face down, on the deck near the rail. Fallon lifted him, swung him aloft, and heaved him over the side to join his companion.

It had been fast work, and Fallon stood at the rail, breathing deeply. He could see both men in the rippling, moonlit water. The shock had revived them and they were both swimming, a little astern. Fallon grimly watched them, but made no effort to help them. They needed something more cleansing than water, but for the present water would suffice.

And now came a voice from somewhere in the shadows of the deck house near the windward rail, crying hoarsely that there was a man overboard.

A bell rang, the noisy engine ceased throbbing. A man leaped from the wheel house, another came from the shadows of the deck house; the engineer emerged from his shallow hold and helped the other launch a small boat.

The victims of Fallon's smashing punches were far astern now, and were filling the night with their cries for help. Fallon watched the boat approach them; saw them pulled to safety. Then he left the rail and went to his room, first picking up the knife and balancing it in his hand.

"Gold, eh?" he said speculatively. "Well, yes; I've known of gold doing that to men."

Chapter III

FOR perhaps an hour after Fallon stretched himself out in his bunk he was lying there trying to link his fragmentary thoughts into a direct chain of reasoning which would result in a conclusion regarding the attack that had been made upon him.

It seemed to him that the assumption that he might be interested in a gold mine was too flimsy a structure upon which to base a murderous attack with a club and a knife. He could not figure it out. The sensation of pleasant warmth that precedes sleep was stealing over him when he heard a voice coming into his berth from the half-open window.

The voice was low and guarded. It was pitched to harmonize with the breeze and the soft moonlight.

"You saw it, eh?" said the voice.

"Saw it when it started," returned another voice. "I was stretched out on a bale of goods on the after-deck house when I saw the big man and the other fellow slipping along the rail on the port side. They didn't see me because I was lying flat. They were watching Fallon, who was sitting in a chair near the starboard rail, smoking and watching the shore line.

"The big man—his name is Blandin—had got a stick of timber, from the pile beside the stoke-hole door, maybe. It was about three inches thick. He was holding it behind him as him and the other fellow sneaked along

the rail. He turned once, and I saw it. The other fellow's name is Kelso.

"Fallon had got up and was knocking the ashes from his pipe when the big man let drive at him. I was just opening my mouth to yell when Fallon ducked. Blandin busted his club on the rail and before he could move out of his tracks Fallon smashed him. I never saw a man put so much steam into his punches. How Blandin stayed up I don't know. He was out—dead on his feet—when he hit the port rail, and he went over like a log.

"Soon as Fallon hit Blandin this Kelso rushed him. I saw Kelso's knife flash. He got his so quick he didn't know what hit him. He dropped like a bag of meal. And then this Fallon picked him up like he was lifting a baby and heaved him over the side. Seems Fallon was kind of stirred up over the way they'd come at him."

"Should think he would be," came the reply. "Fallon, you say his name is. Not Jim Fallon—the Klondike Fallon?"

"That's him. You've heard of him, eh?"

"Heard of him!" The voice was derisive. "Who hasn't heard of Klondike Fallon? He's one of the coolest and nerviest dare-devils that ever drove a dog team near the Circle. So he handled Kelso like he was handling a baby, eh? He could do that. There's tales about his strength. Dead shot. A wizard with a knife. Can wear out half a dozen men on a trail. So that's Fallon, eh? Who was telling you?"

"Angus Mackenzie. That Underhill man sent him up here to find his boy. Angus got word from Underhill about two weeks ago, and he sent runners out to locate Jackwoon and have him meet Fallon at Rossville."

"Old Angus is usually as close with his mouth as with his money. How did he come to be telling you that?"

"The runners were sent out from Rossville," was the answer. "I carried word to Landieu last trip. I brought word about young Underhill to Mackenzie from Landieu."

"About Blandin and Kelso and this woman. Did old Angus tell you anything about them?"

"Only their names. That's all he knows about them. Seems they were in some hurry about getting north. Angus made arrangements for them with Landieu at Rossville for canoes and guides."

"What's the woman's name?"

"Devake. I heard Blandin call her Blanche."

"Sounds like a stage name. She—well, she ain't just the sort a man marries, is she?"

Both men laughed.

They were silent for a time and then one of them said: "What do you suppose Fallon will do about them trying to murder him?"

"He won't do anything. As far as he's concerned, that affair is ended. Would you expect him to go to the police? Fallon ain't that kind. Whatever is done he will do himself. Maybe he'll finish with them when he sees them again. They got off easy—with a ducking. The big man's got a smashed face though. Three or four front teeth missing and his mouth all knocked out of shape. The other fellow won't be able to see out of his eyes for a couple of days. I don't know what the trouble between them was, but if they're wise they'll leave Fallon alone."

The remainder of their conversation was not inter-

esting to Fallon, though he went to sleep hearing their voices.

He breakfasted alone the next morning, and for a while afterward he stood in the bow of the little vessel beside the wheelhouse talking with the helmsman. The man's voice was not one of those he had heard during the night.

Later he went aft to smoke. The steamer was slow, but the shore astern had vanished. A brassy sun swam in a white sky and the wind had died.

They went serenely past little timber-clad islands which were supremely calm and peaceful in their isolation; past wooded points that were boldly thrust out from the mainland. Bays, inlets, miles of marsh, rocky cliffs, and timber-studded shore line came up, were passed and left behind.

There was little change in the character of the surrounding country. Few salient features appeared. There was a deadly and monotonous sameness in the landscape, and the atmosphere brought to one a sensation of vague and indefinable perturbation, as if the encompassing distances were immeasurable and composed of elements that were mocking and waiting for an opportunity to pounce upon one.

This spell that seized man was his dread and fear of the unknown. It pursues all men who thread the Northern wilderness. It is the muted voice of the Wild.

There was no one on deck. Fallon was alone. He sought a chair behind the deck house, tilted it back against the wall, and yielded to his thoughts.

For perhaps an hour he sat there staring at the vessel's wake, watching the tumbling water gradually return to

its previous placidity. And then he looked up to see the woman of the wharf at Grand Marias moving along the deck toward him.

She had evidently not seen him, for she was looking westward where the far, wooded shore line blended with the horizon.

She paused at the rail within a dozen feet of Fallon, and Fallon devoted himself to his smoking. She was good to look at, but he was not interested in her. After a while she turned, and he knew she was watching him. He turned and looked straight at her. Her face was flushed but her gaze was direct and defiant.

Fallon lifted his cap.

"Good-morning, Miss Devake," he said.

"How did you learn my name?" she asked.

"I do not remember. It seems to me that you must have given it to me yesterday, on the wharf at Grand Marias."

"You are mistaken."

She had regained her poise. She was tranquil and serene, outwardly at least, and to Fallon, considering what had happened during the night, her manner proved that she was an adversary to be respected. The cool audacity lurking in the depths of her eyes as she faced him stirred him to something like wonder. Only a woman could have presented such self-control to an enemy. A man would have betrayed his feelings in some way.

"Well, I can't be certain," he said. "If you didn't tell me your name I must have got it some other way."

"Obviously."

"The point is that I know it," he added.

"We are even there, at least," she retorted coolly. "I know yours. You are Jim Fallon—Klondike Fallon."

"You got that from Mackenzie, eh?" He smiled at her. "You knew my name while you were trying to pump me."

"No. To tell the truth, I had an idea you were a greenhorn who had come up here to blunder into other people's business."

"You are flatteringly frank."

"Sometimes."

"Yesterday?"

"No. I was after information yesterday, Fallon."

"And to-day?"

"I've got it."

"That must be encouraging to you."

"It is. We don't have to do any more guessing. We pumped old Angus Mackenzie. Old man Underhill sent you up here to search for his son."

Fallon was silent. He was not aware that his mission was to be kept secret.

"You are a good man, Fallon," she resumed. "You are brave and resourceful and strong." A smile, reluctantly admiring and perhaps a bit wistful, tugged at her lips as she pronounced the final word, giving it emphasis by lingering upon it slightly.

"Then you heard of the midnight bathing incident," Fallon interjected.

"That was a mistake," she said. "I warned them not to try it. But they were determined. They insisted it was the only way to get rid of you."

"Attempted murder. And you made no effort to stop

them. And yesterday when you were talking to me on the wharf I was almost certain I had made a conquest."

"You are lying," she said calmly. "You are cold—contemptuous. You don't like women like me. You prefer them unspoiled. You knew all the time that I was just trying to pump you. You treated me like a lady, though. I want to thank you for that. I had to go through with it. We hadn't tackled Mackenzie then. And we had to know."

"What difference did it make? You say you had to know. What do you care about young Underhill? What is he to you? If he's alive why don't you let him communicate with his father? The man is frantic. If you've got him why don't you set a price on him? Why all the mystery?"

She shook her head unsmilingly.

"You are smart, Fallon," she said. "But that is not the way to get at it."

"Perhaps not. But you certainly knew that Underhill would make at least one more search for the boy and that he'd find some man who would be willing to do it."

"He'll not find another Jim Fallon."

"He doesn't need to. Jim Fallon is here."

"Yes," she said wryly, "we know it. But suppose Jim Fallon should spend two or three months up here minding his own business, and then would go back to Underhill and tell him that the search had been fruitless. And suppose that merely upon Jim Fallon's word that he would spend two or three perfectly idle months up here he would one day mysteriously receive fifty thousand dollars. Would that have any effect upon Jim Fallon?"

"It wouldn't thrill me at all, Blanche," he returned. He smiled at her. "It's a big thing if you can offer fifty thousand."

"It's too big to lose, Fallon. And I warn you that we won't be interfered with. I've offered to buy you off. You've laughed at me. You know what happened last night. Don't be foolish. They'll try it again and again, until they succeed. You don't know the country into which you are going. We do. They'll have a thousand chances to murder you, and they'll do it."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for warning me." He looked at her appraisingly, curiously. "Why did you warn me?" he added.

To his amazement he saw a flood of color steal up her neck and quickly diffuse itself over her cheeks and temples. She fought it, but in vain. Her eyes flashed and her lips curved with disdain and contempt. But the tell-tale color still flamed under the rouge.

"I've warned you because I hate you, Fallon!" she declared derisively.

She turned and walked rapidly away, leaving Fallon to stare into the empty distance while he meditated upon the inconsistencies of her sex.

He knew that she had developed some sort of a sentiment for him, despite the fact that he had not encouraged it; and he was now able to explain the hostility she had exhibited toward him upon the occasion of their first meeting in Saint Boniface. She had then suspected him of prospective interference in her projects, but had instantly been attracted to him, and the hostility had been provoked by a fear that she would ultimately surrender to him, as women of her type have surrendered

for hundreds of generations—as she had almost surrendered while standing there upon the deck.

Fallon's face grew long, for he had no desire to profit by a woman's weakness. If she had not spoken to him this morning, if she had kept silent instead of letting him know that she had discovered his identity and was aware of the nature of the errand that had sent him north, he would have gone his way without knowing that she and her friends were implicated in the disappearance of Lin Underhill.

But there it was—the revelation of their complicity. Either Lin Underhill had been murdered by these people and they were trying to keep the authorities from getting evidence that would convict them, or Lin was alive and they were holding him for some purpose which had not yet been revealed or suspected.

Chapter IV

THE little steamer nosed her prow into the channel between Ross Island and the mainland shortly after dawn of the second morning, and in a short time was lashed to the log wharf at Rossville.

The lake, stretching away from the channel, and the other waters that were visible from the deck of the steamer, shone like a mirror of steel in the still air. The various islands dotting the water here and there were like huge blooms of green, so thickly were they wooded.

But here, too, was the monotonous sameness of the land. Upon all sides and reaching into the far distances, the scene upon which Fallon gazed was a thousand times duplicated. Lakes and streams of glittering water, ranges of wooded hills, marshes, and barrens ranged away into immeasurable and incomprehensible space.

Rossville was perched upon some huge granite rocks and a little distance from the channel. The trading post was close to the landing platform upon which Fallon stepped as soon as the vessel was moored.

Blandin and Kelso and Blanche Devake were not to be seen, and Fallon suspected they were deliberately delaying their appearance until he should get out of the way.

Perhaps they thought he meant to report their attack upon him, but he had no such intention. He overlooked the unloading of his dunnage, piled it against the wall

of the trading-post building, and sought the trader, Landieu, who had been standing in the doorway watching the steamer dock.

Landieu was tall, slender, courteous; and under his silken graying mustache his white teeth gleamed as he smiled at Fallon.

Fallon returned the smile.

"Monsieur Landieu?" said Fallon.

He liked the trader instantly. The man was a gentleman. He was quiet, slow of speech, and there was a manner about him that could not be acquired in one generation, but had to be inherited. Also, he was blessed with an intellect, for his fine, keen eyes had that knowing, confident gleam which is absent in the eyes of fools.

"You are M'sieur Fallon, of course. You are expected. There can be no mistake, for when one has a mental picture of a man whom he knows by reputation one instinctively recognizes the original."

"I am Fallon, monsieur."

"We have followed instructions. Jackwoon is here."

"Thank you, monsieur. Did your runners have trouble in locating him?"

"They do not say. But Jackson is here. Trouble, m'sieur, is not to be considered when a thing is to be done."

"Good. Monsieur Landieu has had experience."

"M'sieu Fallon has had experience also. Great experience. Otherwise he would not be thinking of entering three hundred miles of the most terrible wilderness in the world."

"Jackwoon knows the country?"

Landieu shrugged his shoulders and smiled deprecatingly.

"Jackwoon is an Indian. What does he know? Who can tell? He was born on the Nelson. He is a Chippewa. He has a reputation. But what can be assured from that? The devil has a reputation, yet *le bon Dieu* cast him out of heaven, we are told. Jackwoon will guide you. He has been faithful, until——" He paused, smiled.

"Until Lin Underhill," said Fallon.

"Yes." Landieu shook his head furtively, watching the door, apparently fearful that his words would be overheard. His voice sank almost to a whisper.

"The young Underhill was with Jackwoon. Puf! He vanishes! There is a note. The note says he has gone north. Where? What is there in the North? Jackwoon knows the woods—every stream and river and lake, and every game trail. He can track the wolf and the lynx, and yet he cannot track a greenhorn, who would leave more signs than the moose. M'sieur, there is something."

Fallon's brows drew together, but he said nothing.

It had been at his suggestion that the elder Underhill had caused runners to be started into the wilderness to search for Jackwoon. He wanted Jackwoon to guide him down the Hayes, over the same trail that he had taken Lin Underhill. He wanted to watch Jackwoon; wanted to observe his movement, wanted to study him. He, too, had been suspicious of the Indian.

Landieu's gaze was upon Fallon. Shrewdly, keenly, he watched the deliberate, undemonstrative man to whom he had confided a suspicion that he would not have voiced to another.

But he had seen—and liked—Lin Underhill; and he had heard of Fallon. He was a reader of faces, and he had read Fallon's.

"M'sieu Fallon says nothing, eh? But M'sieur Fallon thinks. It is well. It is well to appear unsuspicious, to invite still other deceptions." He laughed, drawing a reluctant smile to Fallon's lips.

"But we must have men of brains in this country, m'sieu. We must have honesty and courage and justice here, if we are to prosper. It does the country no good, m'sieu, to have guides that cannot be trusted, who see men disappear almost before their eyes, and who come back with tales of notes that tell of one going north without reason. But I, m'sieu, I know nothing about how things happen. I keep my knowledge and suspicions to myself except when I know to whom I am talking. If a trapper says: 'It is strange what has happened to Underhill,' I answer that it is certainly strange—which is true enough, and does not commit me. If another asks how it happened that Jackwoon could let a man get lost right under his nose, I say that I do not know—that Jackwoon is a good guide."

But Fallon was not thinking of taking anyone into his confidence, not even Landieu.

He made some inquiries about the country, about supplies. Then he walked to the door of the post building, leaned against one of the jambs, and watched the gangplank of the steamer.

Blanche Devake and Kelso and Blandin were stepping down to the wharf. The woman came first, and for an instant her gaze met Fallon's. She gave no indication that she had seen him.

Blandin descended. His lips were swollen grotesquely, and his eyes were sullen as he caught sight of Fallon, though Fallon stared past him. Kelso's eyes were purple and puffed, and almost closed. He did not look at Fallon, but bent his head and pretended to be interested in the luggage that was piled on the wharf near him.

The three were on the wharf only a few minutes. They presently moved off and Fallon saw them walking toward a hut near which half a dozen dogs were snarling and fighting.

"*Sacré nom!*" ejaculated Landieu, at Fallon's shoulder. "M'sieur is not fastidious about his fellow travelers!"

"You know them, eh?" said Fallon.

"They have been here before, m'sieu. Once last year, and once before, this year. They go east, to the Randall château."

Fallon's eyelashes flickered and the keen-eyed post trader smiled.

"M'sieu has heard of the stone château?"

"It has been mentioned in my presence."

"M'sieu is discreet," said Landieu. "It is well. But m'sieu need not fear Landieu. Madame Devake and her friends came here to buy their outfit last year. I smile—yes. I am polite—yes. And I sell my goods to whoever have the money. But I read faces also, m'sieu, and I know madame and her friends are a bad influence in the country. And they go down the Hayes also, m'sieu."

"Friends of Randall?"

"Ah! I do not know. One supposes they are friends or they would not visit so often. But does it not make one wonder at Monsieur Randall, that he should have such friends?"

"Randall has a good reputation?"

"The best. That is what makes it strange."

Fallon did not answer, and Landieu went on: "The little man is Kelso. He bears a name that is honored in this country, but this man is not honorable. Nor his friend, Blandin. Blandin is the type of man that is considered handsome by many women, m'sieu—by women who place physical attractiveness above character. Alas! there are many such women!"

Landieu laughed, adding: "Blandin is not so attractive this morning, m'sieu. Did you observe his mouth? It is hideous. And the little man—Kelso. Does m'sieu know what happened to them?"

Fallon did not answer. He felt his right hand lifted by Landieu, and turned to see it solemnly examined.

"Ah, m'sieu, that is quite a bruise. See, the skin is broken. M'sieu must be careful of an infection. Come in. I have some salve which has magic healing power."

"Monsieur Landieu's concern is appreciated," said Fallon gently. He knew that presently the steamer's crew would tell the trader what had happened on the deck the first night out, but so far as he was concerned the incident was closed.

But while Landieu bandaged the broken skin over his knuckles he inquired about Jackwoon, and the Indian, sitting on the edge of the low wharf, was pointed out to him.

Jackwoon appeared to be indifferent to his surroundings. His legs were dangling over the edge of the wharf, and he was hunched up, smoking a short-stemmed pipe.

Landieu hailed him, telling him to come and meet the man who had engaged his services, and Jackwoon, civil

and quiet, and deliberate of movement, approached and was introduced to Fallon.

Jackwoon was short and heavy. He was not fat, but muscular. There was strength in his broad shoulders and in his thick arms and wrists. His face was broad, his forehead low, and his straight black hair was smoothed and greased so that it emphasized the flatness of his head. His nose was big. His eyes, black, lambent, sly, met Fallon's briefly. His lips smiled shallowly.

"Where M'sieu Fallon go?" he asked, employing the macaronic jargon in which it is alone possible for the Indian and the white man to converse.

"Down the Hayes."

"How far go?"

The black eyes darted a glance into Fallon's—a probing, searching glance which would perhaps enable him to discover something about the character of the big white man who had sought him out.

What he saw was a pair of steady blue eyes which were entirely lacking in warmth. Whatever was in them was not for Jackwoon to see. They had glinted with various emotions when he had been talking with Blanche Devake, but now there was in them a baffling vacuity which could not be penetrated or analyzed. There was no antagonism, no friendliness, in them.

Jackwoon's gaze wavered, drooped.

"To where you lost Underhill," said Fallon. "How far is that?"

"Ten sleep—mebbe." He smiled apologetically. "Jackwoon good guide. Underhill man know too much. No listen."

"All right," said Fallon. "Where is your canoe?"

Jackwoon pointed to a sloping, stony beach where a light canoe was drawn up, and then stood listening while Fallon bought a second canoe from Landieu.

"All right, Jackwoon; we'll split the load," said Fallon. He strode to where his dunnage was piled, separated it, and pointed to the portion the guide was to take.

"You go now?" questioned the latter. "You got grub?"

"Right away."

Landieu slid out a canoe equipped with paddle and pole, and then went inside with Fallon, where the food supply was selected and packed.

An hour later Jackwoon, somewhat reluctantly it seemed, pushed off in his canoe and deftly swept it outward from the shore, where he permitted the craft to float idly in the current while he watched Fallon. His face was inscrutable, but his eyes quickened when he observed that the white man's movements were as certain and definite as his own.

A wave of the hand by Fallon, a low "*Le bon Dieu* be with you" from Landieu standing on the wharf, and they were off, with Jackwoon heading his craft straight down the channel toward the vast wilderness beyond.

As the paddles flashed in the bright sunlight, smoothly slipping in and out of the mirrorlike surface of the water, Landieu turned and gazed back toward the land.

In front of the hut to which they had gone directly after leaving the steamer stood Blandin, Kelso, and Blanche Devake.

They were watching Jackwoon and Fallon, who were already far down the channel.

Kelso was smoking a cigarette and was leaning against

the wall of the hut. The Devake woman's hands were resting upon her hips as she stood near Kelso. Blandin, his arms folded across his chest, his hat pulled well down over his eyes, was cursing.

"Damn him!" he said. "Does he think he's going to get away that easy after knocking my face off?"

"Oh, shut up, Bill!" advised the woman. "You brought that upon yourself by being too eager."

"You've said that twice," said Blandin, his face whitening with fury. "If you say it again I'll knock hell out of you!"

The woman smiled with maddening calmness. "Better save your energy for Fallon," she said; "you'll need it."

Chapter V

JACKWOON paddled steadily, driving his canoe ahead with slow, graceful, sweeping strokes that sent the light craft skittering over the water like a dry leaf in a breeze. The Indian did not look back.

A hundred yards behind came Fallon's canoe. It was handled as capably as the Indian's. There was seemingly no effort in Fallon's movements—in his sliding, dipping, deftly turned strokes that created only a gently swirling eddy on the surface of the water.

Jackwoon's failure to glance back was significant. It told Fallon that already the Indian had appraised him and had decided he was experienced. If he had betrayed awkwardness in getting his canoe off, or if his handling of the paddle had revealed lack of skill, Jackwoon would have shown some interest in him.

Rossville was the last settlement they would encounter until they reached Hudson Bay—if they went that far. On some far waterway there might be a trading post, but if there was Fallon had no knowledge of it. And when they had traveled three or four miles down the channel a jutting shoulder of the mainland shut Rossville from their view and they were in the wilderness.

They went on, skimming the mirrorlike surface of the water, past innumerable small islands whose timbered

edges were reflected with amazing sharpness, through the ever-narrowing channel between the heavily wooded shores. At noon they were on the slender stream that connects the channel with Pipestone Lake, and at dusk the keels of their canoes grated slightly on the pebbly gravel and sand of a small midstream island which was featured by ice-polished boulders and tufts of black willow.

It was Fallon who selected the island as a camping place for the night. Jackwoon had mutely pointed to a sloping beach on the mainland southward, but Fallon had shaken his head in dissent.

The canoes were beached and the cargo unpacked. Jackwoon soon had a fire going, and while he was engaged in cooking supper Fallon inspected the island, which was an oblong piece of land about a hundred yards wide at its broadest part and probably two hundred yards long.

There was little current in the river; the water was smooth and glassy, and the silence sepulchral. After supper Fallon stretched himself on a rock near the fire and smoked. Jackwoon, having washed the cooking utensils and restored them to their bag, was squatted near the fire. He also was smoking, and his wide, flat face was expressionless.

All day Fallon had studied the Indian; and now across the fire he was again attempting to solve the enigma of the man's character.

He knew, however, that he had made little progress. Innocent or guilty, noble or ignoble, the Indian masks his feelings with a stoic indifference which is not to be penetrated. Whatever Jackwoon knew about the disap-

pearance of Lin Underhill he would keep to himself. He would evade straight or direct questions and he would not be trapped by oblique ones.

And yet one thing had Fallon observed, and he got a malicious satisfaction out of the knowledge.

Jackwoon was uncomfortable in his presence. His attempts to conceal the fact only resulted in making his condition more apparent to the observing eyes that watched him.

So far, Fallon had not spoken a dozen words to Jackwoon, and he did not speak now as he smoked and studied the Indian's face, which was illumined by the ruddy glow of the fire. But Jackwoon was aware that he was being watched and he was uneasy.

An hour passed. Fallon had not moved except to refill his pipe. Jackwoon still squatted near the fire, which he replenished from time to time. The darkness deepened; the white light in the north sank close to the horizon. Reddish tinted stars came out; the black forests on all sides grew to a denser black and seemed to creep nearer. A lynx screamed like a woman being subjected to excruciating torture. A wolf howled.

Jackwoon had been uncomfortable all day, with the knowledge that the keen-eyed white man had been watching him. Most white men who had come under Jackwoon's observation talked more or less. This man—this Fallon—did not talk except when he gave orders. He was lying on the rock now, staring. Jackwoon did not look at him, but he could *feel* Fallon's gaze; and he knew that if he looked up now Fallon's cold, steady gaze would be fixed upon him.

A strange man, Fallon. The primitive mind of the

Indian was awed by the power and force he felt in the white man. He grew more uneasy.

And then, like a whisper, low and gentle, it came—Fallon's voice:

"Was Underhill a good man?"

"Um. Him good man. But him know too much. Go 'lone. Not know country."

"You were in camp?"

"Yes. One sleep."

"Underhill leave at night?"

"In morning. We want meat. I go hunt. Come back noon—him gone."

"Which way?"

"Him go north."

"Where was the camp?"

"On Shamattawa. Merry Lake."

"Where had you been?"

"Come back from south."

"Where were you going?"

"To Hayes River. Fox River, mebbe. Underhill say look for more timber."

• "Meet anybody? White man?—Indian?"

"Indian—one time—two time. Know 'em."

"No white men?"

Jackwoon's answers had up to this time been given instantly. Now he hesitated. The hesitation was only momentary, but it was enough to convince Fallon that the Indian was considering his answer.

"No white men. Indian. Cree."

"Underhill good hunter?"

"Him no hunt."

"Carry rifle?"

"In canoe. Carry on portage."

"How do you know he went north?"

"Find tracks."

"How far from Shamattawa to Hayes?"

"Seventy—eighty mile."

"Underhill take grub?"

Jackwoon shook his head negatively.

"Take rifle?"

"Him take rifle. Go hunt—mebbe. Get lost. Mebbe no grub for week—two. Him no good shoot."

"You saw him shoot?"

"Him shoot at deer. So times." Jackwoon held up his hand and separated the fingers until he had counted four. "No hittum," he added.

"He load rifle again, after he missed the deer?"

"His rifle always loaded."

"How far did you track him?"

"Lose him ten—fi'teen mile. Big rain. Go north anyway. No find. Go Fox River—to Randall. Big hunt—Randall, Indian. No find. Go back to canoe—to Landieu. Give Landieu Underhill man stuff. Talk police. Underhill man lost. No find."

"Too bad," said Fallon. He was silent for a time. The fire grew low, its light dimmed. Then suddenly, from the darkness of the rock, Fallon fired another question—sharp, stern.

"What did Blandin say?"

In the dying firelight Fallon saw the stoic calm of Jackwoon's face disturbed by a quick tightening of the lips. He was startled. He spoke hesitatingly.

"Blandin say Underhill man——" He hesitated, his face grew blank. He shook his head with a violent nega-

tive. "Jackwoon not know Blandin man. Mebbe see—not know."

"What did Blandin say?"

"Him say Underhill man lost—mebbe."

"Who did he say that to?"

"Randall—mebbe. Hear him say. Forget."

"At Randall's place?"

Jackwoon shook his head. "No can think."

"Blandin was up here twice last year. You see him?"

"See um—mebbe. No talk um."

"Blandin had a guide?"

"Ugh. Kumwa—Cree. More." Jackwoon held up four fingers.

Fallon did not ask any more questions. Shortly after daybreak they were in the canoes again, and Fallon saved his breath for the paddling. He now knew that there was little prospect of getting any information out of Jackwoon. The Indian had been implicated in the disappearance of Lin Underhill, but he had been instructed, perhaps bribed, to pretend ignorance.

He had been surprised into divulging the fact that he had talked with Blandin. His explanation that he had not talked personally with Blandin had not convinced Fallon, for he remembered the stupefied expression of the Indian's face when he realized that he had committed himself.

Moreover, there was something that Fallon had not mentioned to Jackwoon.

He had questioned Jackwoon about Lin Underhill's rifle. Jackwoon had declared that Lin had taken his rifle upon the morning of his disappearance. He had suggested that Lin had gone hunting; that Lin was not a

good marksman; that he had shot at deer—four times—without hitting it. He had agreed that Lin had reloaded his rifle after shooting at the deer; he had stated that Lin's rifle was always loaded.

At the elder Underhill's office in Montana Fallon had examined the effects belonging to Lin Underhill, which had been shipped back to the young man's home at the father's request. Fallon had found two hundred rifle cartridges. The boxes containing them were unbroken. And Landieu, reporting to the elder Underhill, had forwarded an itemized list of the supplies bought by Lin at the trading post. The list revealed that only two hundred cartridges had been purchased.

Lin's gun was of heavier caliber than Jackwoon's, and so obviously Lin had not borrowed cartridges from the Indian. The inference then was that Jackwoon had lied about Lin's having used the rifle and about his having taken it with him when he had disappeared.

However, Fallon did not divulge his knowledge to the Indian. He had discovered enough to convince him that there was a secret understanding between Blandin and Jackwoon, and that he might expect further attacks by Blandin and disloyalty from the Indian.

Chapter VI

DURING the next few days Fallon and Jackwoon made several short portages and one long one. They traveled south, through marshes that connected small lakes and rivers, through rapids that splashed and roared between walls of rock; over placid stretches of water so clear and smooth that it had the appearance of liquid glass. They paddled through vast dark forests; they packed their canoes and dunnage over miles of granite surface which was washed and polished by the glacial action of uncounted centuries.

There were sections where the bare granite was visible for many miles, where the country was barren of all growth with the exception of the moss that clung to the rocks and carpeted the flinty deposit that the rains and snows of ages had swept into the hollows and the depressions. A rough, rugged, primitive land.

Jackwoon went first, always. Behind him, over the barren stretches, through the marshes, on the rivers and lakes, through the vast forest stretches, and over the treeless plains, went Fallon.

Several times Jackwoon tested the mettle of the white man. On the portages he moved with the definite celerity of long experience in the work, and to this he added new effort—effort that taxed his toughened muscles and stamina. He wanted to find out what sort of man Fallon was; and when he portaged, loaded with canoe and pack,

he would not look back at the white man, but would ignore him while he sought to outdistance him.

He never succeeded. If the portage was a mile or ten miles he always found Fallon at his heels when he halted or when the portage ended. And he was amazed and sullen when he found Fallon still fresh and strong. However, he was compelled to admit that Fallon's strength and stamina were greater than his own, for there were times at the end of a portage that he was ready to sink to the ground from weariness. That he did not yield to his weariness was because of his pride. He would be extravagantly deliberate in lowering his pack and in setting his canoe down, knowing that an exhibition of haste would betray his weariness to the white man. But after the load was off his shoulders he would not be able instantly to straighten his cramped legs, and so Fallon could not fail to realize his condition.

He watched keenly for signs of weakness or weariness in Fallon's movements. He observed no such signs. Fallon appeared to be tireless. He would drop his pack carelessly, swing his canoe off his shoulders with marvelous ease and dexterity, flex his great muscles like an athlete going through setting-up exercises, and expand his great chest with obvious delight. At such times his blue eyes would dance with exultation.

A great man, conceded Jackwoon. A white god. Never had he seen another like him. There was in Jackwoon a reluctant admiration, restrained and tempered by the hatred that is engendered by the consciousness of inferiority.

And Fallon had ceased talking. Never another word did he utter about Lin Underhill or Blandin. But he had

not ceased watching Jackwoon. Wherever they were—on a portage, on the surface of a stream, in camp on a woodland shore, or taking their meals together over a campfire—the Indian was always conscious that the white man was watching him, studying him, gazing steadily at him out of an enigmatic silence.

Day by day Jackwoon grew more uneasy. And day by day his hatred of Fallon grew. He began to wonder about ways and means of getting rid of Fallon. There were many ways, of course. The only thing that deterred him was the conviction that he would not succeed, that Fallon was invulnerable, that thoughts of death and Fallon were somehow incongruous, that death for Fallon was a possibility so remote that the brain could not comprehend or the mental eye visualize it. And yet Jackwoon's mind dwelt upon it.

They were on the Hayes River, paddling down a gorge between two small lakes, when the dark thought came to Jackwoon. At first it startled him, for it was nothing short of an inspiration. Then as he sent the canoe swiftly down the stream he dwelt upon the idea, considering it well. In the end he decided to act upon it.

The stream was here smooth and wide and deep. The current was lazy, but he, who had paddled down it many times, knew of its powerful lower current, knew that the water felt the pull of the tearing, rushing rapids not more than two or three miles distant.

A few—a very few times—had the rapids been shot with a canoe. Jackwoon had achieved the feat once, but he knew he would never try it again. There was a channel, to be sure, and he had found it. But the finding had been merely accidental, his ultimate escape from the

huge hidden rocks having resulted from the fact that in his fright he had done nothing more than permit the canoe to race with the current. He had seen the rocks, had felt them merely touch the sides and bottom of his craft as he had flashed past them on the crests of the boiling waves that swirled and eddied like some mad monster in the agonies of death.

And now Jackwoon's eyes glittered. Now he would see if the white man were invulnerable; would see if his gods could keep his death from him.

He had not told Fallon about the rapids. And now, already feeling the surface pull of the current, he made not a motion that might be construed as apprehension or preparation. He did not shift his position or turn his head.

Half a mile from the rapids the current seized them and bore them along swiftly, faster than either man could paddle. A paddle could not increase the speed of their canoes, and was of use only as a rudder. The stream made a sharp bend to the right and the big granite walls around which the water surged concealed the rapids from view until one was almost upon them.

Jackwoon knew exactly what Fallon's intelligence would impel him to do. He could do nothing less, and nothing more. And as Jackwoon's craft sped along the curving walls he observed out of the corners of his eyes that the white man was striving to drive closer, so that he might not lose sight of his guide and thus be at the mercy of chance in striking the channel. Yes, Fallon had divined what was coming; the swiftness of the current had warned him.

He thought just what Jackwoon wanted him to think—that Jackwoon's purpose was to run the rapids. And now, cunningly, the Indian used his paddle, retarding slightly the speed of his craft. He knew that the white man would feel that he understood his guide's purpose, which would be to permit him to draw closer so that he would have no trouble keeping his canoe in the wake of the other.

When after a while the white water came into sight Jackwoon made his first sign, a signal to apprise the white man of danger. He moved his left hand slightly outward, as though pushing something invisible, warning Fallon to keep out from the granite walls. If Fallon did that, if he permitted his canoe to be seized by the current in the center of the river, he would not be able to drive his canoe out of it before he reached the white water. If the white water caught him his gods would have to take the paddle into their hands.

And Fallon obeyed his signal.

It was done quickly. At the edge of the white water Jackwoon swiftly swung the prow of his canoe around and drove it shoreward, into a sheltered lagoon out of the current, where the water calmly swirled against a low, receding shore line.

He saw Fallon's canoe shoot by. He caught a glimpse of the white man's face, met the glint of contempt in his eyes; noted with silent fury a grim smile curving his lips. And then Fallon was in the white water, and the spume was covering him like a white, fleecy veil.

Jackwoon sat long in his canoe at the edge of the receding beach. He was smiling vindictively. No more

uneasiness; no more of feeling his back muscles cringe and writhe with the white man's gaze upon him. No more sitting across from Fallon at the campfire not daring to lift his gaze from the embers.

He'd go back now, to Rossville, to Landieu, and report Fallon's death. An accident, of course. Fallon had been determined to shoot the rapids, even after he had been told of the danger.

Jackwoon was very deliberate now. There was time. He landed, dragged his canoe to the sloping beach, got his pack ready, swung it from his shoulders, balanced the canoe, and set off over the portage that he always used in going around the rapids.

It was not a very difficult portage, but it was rather long, for it led down a slope away from the river for quite a distance, then circled back to the smooth water perhaps a mile from the rapids.

It was Jackwoon's curiosity that was sending him to the still water, where he might find Fallon's body and the wreck of his canoe. Jackwoon would spend the night there, perhaps, watching the dark waters by the light of his fire, gloating over the death of the godlike white man whose strength and spirit had seemed unconquerable. This white man who was so wise and yet had been led to his death by the waving of a hand.

Exultant, grinning his triumph, and moving with care and deliberation lest he make a false step and bring retribution upon himself for his deed, he came down the long, circling slope toward the level land at the edge of the smooth water. There was some scraggly spruce here, and some poplar and black willow. This growth obstructed his view of the river edge for some time.

But when he got through it and had a clear view of the bank, his knees sagged with sudden weakness and he almost fell.

For there, sitting on the bank, calmly smoking his pipe, was Fallon!

Jackwoon's muscles grew rigid again. His brain flamed with a great wrath. He made no sound, however, but merely stood there staring.

Apparently Fallon was not aware of Jackwoon's presence. His back was toward the Indian. He was sitting on a pebbly slope with his knees drawn up. His arms were folded over his chest, and he seemed to be interestedly watching the smoothly swirling water. His canoe had been pulled up on the bank, away from the water.

Jackwoon's rage and disappointment stirred him to a murderous impulse. He was trembling with eagerness now, but he managed to swing canoe and pack from his shoulders. The rifle he always carried was under the pack straps. He slipped it out, sat down on the pack, raised the rifle to his shoulder, and took steady aim at Fallon's broad back. He pressed the trigger and heard the firing pin click futilely and metallically.

He sat, stupefied, and saw Fallon turn his head and look at him with level gaze.

"No use, Jack," he said. "I took them out several days ago. And there are no more in your pack. I took them, too. They are a good many miles back."

Jackwoon relaxed and sat on the pack with his mouth open. The rifle dropped from his nerveless hands. Awe and a nameless terror had seized him. He would die here. Presently Fallon would draw out his own rifle and begin to shoot. He'd do it calmly, as he did everything.

But for a few minutes nothing happened. Then Fallon turned over on his stomach and Jackwoon observed that while Fallon had been sitting there he had had a rifle between his knees. The weapon was in his hands now, and was carelessly aimed at the Indian. Fallon now spoke, and his voice had a ring of cold contempt in it.

"You have forgotten your gods, eh, Jack?"

Jackwoon did not answer. He could think of nothing to say. He was not afraid now. He had a fatalistic conviction that he was to die in this place, where he had twice attempted the white man's life. Two failures were enough. And so he sat, his eyes sullen, his lips in a heavy pout, returning Fallon's gaze. His God had deserted him.

"Shoot!" he said.

"Presently."

For a long time Fallon was silent. He watched Jackwoon's face over the barrel of the rifle. He moved the muzzle slowly. He seemed to be undecided. Twice the muzzle covered the Indian's heart; once it was directed at his stomach; half a dozen times it was pointed directly at his forehead, for, staring at the muzzle, he could look along the barrel.

The white man's steady eyes were on the sights, and with death imminent Jackwoon wondered and marveled at Fallon's cold nerve.

"How old are you, Jack?" he said.

"Thirty-four summers."

"Married?"

"Me got squaw."

"Papoose?"

"No."

"Well, if you die now it won't make any difference. Maybe squaw like you now. Maybe when you die she'll get another brave. There's always another brave, Jack."

Jackwoon's lips formed a word but gave forth no sound.

White Bear!

Fallon was right. Many times had Jackwoon's heart been torn by jealousy of White Bear. For he had observed how White Bear's eyes quickened when they rested upon his woman; he had noted how White Bear had preened himself when he thought Jackwoon's woman was looking at him. And he knew that when his death was established as a certainty White Bear would make the advances he had long meditated.

Fallon had observed Jackwoon's hesitation; he saw the dark blood steal into Jackwoon's face and down again, to coagulate and burn at his heart. Cunningly, and with a deep knowledge of the elementary passions of Jackwoon, learned by his constant scrutiny and study of the man during the days and nights of their journey, Fallon had struck the chord that had set his heart to tingling with a desire to live.

But not at once did Jackwoon speak. Nor did Fallon interfere with his mental processes. The silence between them grew long.

"White man no shoot. Jackwoon sorry."

The words came slowly, reluctantly. But the sullen eyes were gleaming hopefully.

"You want to live, eh?"

A nod.

"All right. You live. How long you will live depends

upon how you answer some questions. Is Lin Underhill alive?"

Jackwoon nodded.

"Where is he?"

"Not know."

"Who took him away?"

"Blandin. Kelso. Indian." Jackwoon held up four fingers.

"Blandin, Kelso, and four Indians?"

A nod.

"They took him from your Shamattawa camp?"

"Yes."

"Was Underhill hurt?"

"No."

"Where did they take him?"

"Not know."

"You see him afterward?"

"No. No see him again."

"What did Blandin say?" Fallon repeated the question he had asked Jackwoon several days ago.

"Blandin say they no hurt Underhill. Take him 'way—no hurt him."

"Why did they take him away?"

"Jackwoon not know. Jackwoon know nothing. Blandin say give Jackwoon new rifle, canoe, plenty gold soon if keep mouth shut. Get rifle, canoe. No gold."

"That's why you tried to kill me. The gold hasn't been paid and you thought it wouldn't be paid if I interfered."

Apparently Jackwoon understood enough of this to comprehend Fallon's meaning, for his gaze wavered.

"Is Underhill on the Shamattawa?"

"Underhill north."

"Where?"

Jackwoon shook his head.

"Where does Randall live?"

"Little Fox—Big Fox."

"How far?"

"One sleep down river. Three sleep north."

Fallon was silent. He was silent so long that Jackwoon grew cold with a dread that sat so heavily upon him that it bowed his shoulders.

Fallon was looking at him, but there was no expression in the white man's eyes. They were fixed upon Jackwoon but they seemed to look past him. They were narrowed with thought.

Then, finally, Fallon got up. Slowly he stood erect and stretched his great arms.

"All right, Jack," he said, "let's go."

He walked to his canoe, slipped the rifle into the pack straps, pushed the canoe into the water, and shoved out into the current. He paddled lazily, holding the canoe against the current until Jackwoon launched his own craft and swung down the river ahead of him.

Lin Underhill had not been killed by his abductors. He had been taken north for a purpose which Jackwoon perhaps could not reveal. But the fact that Blanche Devake had offered him fifty thousand dollars proved conclusively to Fallon that the purpose was to obtain from Underhill a large amount of money. The money would be obtained by ransom or by taking possession of gold that Lin Underhill had acquired since he had come into the country.

Fallon had some reason to think that the money

would come from the latter source. For as yet no word that a ransom would be demanded had reached the elder Underhill, and Fallon had not forgotten that the Devake women had mentioned a mine "that would make Midas envious."

Fallon was satisfied. Something had already been accomplished.

And now he knew that this expedition upon which he had embarked was to be not merely a search for a dead man. It was to be a battle for a life and a fortune; for two lives—his own and Lin Underhill's. Arrayed against him were two unscrupulous white men and all the lawless red men that could be bought or bribed. It might be that even the somewhat mythical Randall would develop into an enemy. He was headed into a mysterious country. A few hundred feet in front of him was a faithless guide, behind him were two men who had already revealed their murderous purpose, and upon all sides as he pushed further into the wilderness would be the hazards of the silent coverts from which might be sped the winged arrow of the white men's forest confederates.

Chapter VII

SINCE Fallon had discovered that Lin Underhill was alive and had been taken north there was no need of his visiting Lin's last camp on the Shamat-tawa, and so he told Jackwoon to head straight down the Hayes until he reached a point directly north of where Lin had been captured.

The Indian nodded that he understood, but his mask-like features did not change expression.

Late in the afternoon they crossed a small lake and entered a section of river where there were several islands. The mainland was featured by low, rolling, timber-clad hills which swept down to the water and were fringed by a rank growth of marsh weeds, huge granite rocks, and willows.

The islands were comparatively bare except for ever-green clumps here and there. Fallon selected one of them for a camp, drove his canoe upon a sloping beach, and called to Jackwoon. The Indian was some distance down the river, but he turned and paddled back to where Fallon had landed.

"Good camp place down river, on shore," he suggested, holding his canoe against the current and looking at Fallon.

"How far?"

"Ten mile—mebbe. Makeum 'fore dark. Shallow.

Place where Underhill man cross to go north." Jackwoon's eyes glittered but were instantly veiled. "No canoe. Walk. Hide canoe. Cache grub. Tent. Plenty heavy. Three sleep."

"Trail?"

"Him game trail. Go to Little Fox—Big Fox. Randall house."

"To-morrow," said Fallon.

He stepped ashore, drew his canoe out of the water, and took a turn around the edge of the island to stretch his muscles.

The shore of the island was barren all around and was strewn with great boulders and slabs and squares of granite, moss-grown and polished.

Dusk had come when Fallon returned to where the canoes had landed, and Jackwoon had prepared supper.

They ate in silence, and then Fallon got up, stepped to the river with the frying pan in hand, filled the pan with water, and carefully drowned the fire. Jackwoon said nothing, but watched interestedly.

Fallon sat on a rock and smoked. It was dark now, and Fallon went behind a huge boulder to light his pipe, being careful to cup the blaze of the match with his hand. Over the bowl of the pipe he observed Jackwoon watching him. A fleeting glance, then Jackwoon looked down again.

Later a match blazed in Jackwoon's hand and was applied to his pipe. The match flared brightly, revealing the Indian's flat features and his black, gleaming eyes. The eyes were defiant.

Fallon laughed and threw himself backward behind the boulder where he had lighted his pipe at just the

instant that a rifle bullet, fired from the south bank of the river, struck the rock, glanced off, and went whining into the trees on the north shore.

At the noon halt Fallon had buckled on a cartridge belt, a holster, and a huge Colt revolver which he took from his pack. Jackwoon had watched this ominous proceeding, and he should have taken heed of the threat it portended.

He had no time to regret his action in lighting the match so that its blaze would reveal Fallon to his friends on the south shore. For as Fallon threw himself backward the big gun at his hip crashed heavily, and Jackwoon, throwing himself sideways, received the bullet in his right arm, near the shoulder. He pitched forward to the rocks, screaming curses as Fallon's gun roared again and a naked Indian looming out of the darkness behind him plunged forward and landed heavily beside him.

The rifle on the south shore was silent now, but as Fallon rose to his feet he heard a crunching of the pebbles on the beach behind him; saw a dark figure silhouetted against the faint star haze. He bent his body from the hips and heard a caribou spear hiss over him and shiver itself against the huge boulder behind him. His Colt roared again and the dark figure vanished. A knife rang on the rocks near the shore; there was a splash in the water that sent a fine spray upward. The spray dissolved, the darkness held no more figures; silence again reigned.

For a time Fallon did not move. Jackwoon, the treacherous, did not again raise his voice. Fallon crept forward on his hands and knees and found the knife that had

been dropped by the Indian who had fallen into the water, ran an investigating hand over the weapon, and slipped it into his belt. From its feel he identified it as a long, ivory-handled *kiliutok* knife. It was wet, and he knew the Indian owner had swum to the island with his confederate who had died behind Jackwoon.

There had been three of the Indians. Away back at the edge of the smooth water near the rapids Fallon had seen them, portaging their canoes through the timber. That was why at the smooth water he had forgiven Jackwoon so quickly.

Twice during the day he had seen them again as they lurked behind on the river; and several times in the dark green foliage of the trees far back from the river's edge he had caught the reflection of the sun gleaming on their paddles. The mirrorlike flashes were unmistakable, and he had been able to determine with some accuracy how far they were behind him.

And just at dusk, far up the river, he had seen some tall rushes waving. Twice they had been agitated, and he knew the three Indians had two canoes. Then, when he had left Jackwoon to explore the island he had caught another mirrorlike glint in the timber of the south shore, and he had interpreted it as the dying sunlight gleaming upon the bottom of a canoe. Then, when he had poured water on the fire he had observed Jackwoon's lips droop disappointedly. And again, when he had mutely communicated to Jackwoon his knowledge of the presence of the Indians on the south shore—by lighting his pipe in the shelter of the huge boulder—Jackwoon had defiantly lighted his own in the open, thus exposing Fallon to the fire of the waiting enemy.

In the faint star haze Fallon could see Jackwoon and the first Indian he had killed. The savage, naked except for a breech cloth, was lying face down on a slab of rock, the starlight gleaming on his greased body. Jackwoon was sitting. His left hand was gripping his right arm. He was bent forward.

Fallon sat down on a rock behind the big boulder. His pipe was still going, and for a time he puffed it slowly.

Jackwoon tried to stifle a groan but did not succeed.

"Hurts, eh?" said Fallon unconcernedly. "Well, you were lucky, Jack. My elbow struck a rock when I pulled on you, or you'd have been with your friend in whatever place you think you're going when you cash in. My intentions were good.

"You don't understand that, eh? Well, let's put it this way: I try to kill you. Jackwoon no good. See Indian on bank. Light match."

In the same jargon he continued. He told Jackwoon to light another match and to motion, while the match blazed, to the Indian on the south shore. Then Jackwoon was to sit down again.

Jackwoon obeyed. Apparently there was no instinct or impulse of loyalty in Jackwoon. He sat down again after lighting the match, and waited.

He had not long to wait. Listening, both men could hear the water rippling as the prow of a canoe cleaved it. They could hear the keel of the light craft grate slightly upon the sloping shore.

Jackwoon did not look but he heard a light step behind him, and he shivered and cringed when Fallon's

heavy revolver belched a crimson lance that passed above him. He heard the Indian groan as he fell, and after that there came no sounds except the gentle lapping of the water against the shore and the voices of the denizens of the timber.

Chapter VIII

THE killing of the third Indian was necessary and Fallon felt no remorse for the deed. He had meant to kill Jackwoon, and he had told the Indian the truth about his elbow striking a rock at the instant he had pressed the trigger. For Jackwoon had been disloyal and treacherous.

Twice had Fallon obeyed an impulse of mercy when he should have killed. Once when Blandin and Kelso had attacked him on the steamer and again when Jackwoon had tried to shoot him when his back was turned.

In Fallon was now stirring the primitive passion of self-preservation. Further, augmented by this latest attack upon him by his enemies, Blandin and Kelso, there was the cold determination to fight these men by the methods they themselves had introduced.

The Fallon who stood over Jackwoon after the third Indian had been disposed of was a different Fallon from the one who had spoken so calmly to the guide there beside the smooth water below the rapids. This Fallon was aroused. His manner was the same; he was still deliberate and quiet. But there was a different quality in the quietness, a cold calm that masked turbulent passions, a deliberation that concealed a yearning to do violence to his enemies.

He did not sleep. He sat there, facing Jackwoon

through the short night. When the first gray streaks lighted the eastern sky he got up, walked around the edge of the island, and returned to the Indian.

His voice was sharp when he spoke to Jackwoon as he prepared breakfast. His outward nonchalance had vanished. Not once did he turn his back to the Indian, and when he worked at the canoes his face was always turned to the island. His movements were swift, sure.

He unloaded Jackwoon's canoe, laid the pack on the ground, opened it, and removed everything that belonged to the Indian. To these he added grub enough to last for two or three days.

Then he added the remainder of the Indian's pack to his own effects, distributing the load in the canoe so that it would ride evenly when his own weight was in it, stepped on the shore again and looked at his sullen-eyed guide.

"You're through, Jack," he said. "No good. You stay here. In one—two days, maybe, Blandin and Kelso will come. The grub I'm leaving will last you until then. Light as many fires as you want. I'm losing patience with you."

Jackwoon did not answer. He sat, staring at the ground.

Fallon took up a boulder that must have weighed at least a hundred pounds, carried it to where the Indian's canoe was drawn up on the shore, laid the boulder down, shoved the canoe into the water, picked up the boulder again and dropped it into the center of the craft, smashing its keel and knocking a great hole in its side. He treated the other likewise.

He pushed his own canoe into the water and paddled

down stream, to disappear from Jackwoon's view. Presently he reappeared, heading across the river to the south shore.

In some rushes he found the second canoe belonging to the Indians. After wrecking it he shot his own craft out into the current and vanished among the islands down stream.

He apprehended no further danger from Blandin's hirelings. The three Indians that had attacked him last night had undoubtedly been sent from the vicinity of Rossville by Blandin. Blandin would not go back for others, and some days would elapse before he could get into communication with the various tribes that infested the wilderness.

He had no doubt that Blandin and Kelso were several days behind him, and that they would travel slower than he would travel because of there being three in the party, if they brought Blanche Devake with them.

Although his canoe was now laden with all the luggage, with the exception of the grub and the few articles belonging to Jackwoon, the craft still did not carry more than an ordinary load. It skimmed the water lightly under the impetus of his powerful strokes, and he was soon far down the river.

Jackwoon loyal would have been a help to him, but disloyal he was a burden and a menace. He was aware that without a guide his difficulties would be multiplied, and yet he felt that he was better off alone than with such a guide as Jackwoon. He was a stranger to the country, and yet he was wise with the experience of some years spent in wilderness sections as vast and as desolate as that which he had entered. Moreover, he

knew the water trail that had brought him here and he knew he would be able to find his way out.

The river narrowed to a swiftly flowing stream that swirled between great rocky banks with granite hills looming above them. It broadened into dark, silent stretches that touched gently sloping shores surmounted by green, fringing trees and drooping willows. His canoe slid over riffles where the water was not more than several inches deep as it gurgled and splashed over rocks.

He kept a vigilant watch along the shore for the shallow mentioned by Jackwoon as being the place where Underhill and his captors had crossed to reach the game trail they had taken northward, for he had little faith in Jackwoon's judgment of distance. However, after he had traveled about five miles and had seen no shallow he began to believe Jackwoon had been right.

He had shot swiftly through a gorge between towering rock walls into a broad stretch of smooth water several hundred yards wide and seemingly two or three miles long.

The river here was like a small lake. Along both shores were long stretches of rushes and reeds with a heavy green background of timber so thick and tangled that the gaze could not penetrate it to a distance of more than half a dozen feet. The sun was high now, and it shone straight down the river eastward into Fallon's eyes. He had been paddling down the center where the current would facilitate his speed, but now he drove the canoe toward the north shore, into the shadows

The water was deep and his canoe sped swiftly along the glassy surface.

His thoughts, for the first time this day, were wandering and fragmentary—a mosaic of memory, impressions, fancies. A day in the Yukon when he had been following a dog team . . . a windless day when the surface of the earth was an endless panorama of blinding white snow . . . trees cracking like rifle shots . . . White Horse rapids . . . Dawson . . . Chilcoot Pass . . . Skagway . . . Forty Mile . . . Juneau . . . a day when he had broken through the ice on the Pelly . . . women of the dance halls . . . a day when he had made a strike . . . the hating eyes of a gambler he had caught cheating . . . the midnight sun . . . high hopes of men shining in their eyes . . . the cold . . . seventy below . . . white moons with crimson rims . . . the white silence.

He blinked his eyes rapidly and held his paddle poised, permitting the canoe to glide along unguided while he stared, amazed and incredulous, almost convinced that what he saw was a thought picture that had emanated from his dreams.

Not more than two hundred yards ahead of him, straight down the stream and shooting rapidly shoreward, was a canoe with a woman in it. She had seen him apparently, for she was bending forward, plying the paddle furiously, evidently seeking cover before he should see her. And while he watched her canoe slipped past a rocky point and vanished.

His glance at the woman had been brief, and she was too far away for him to be able to distinguish her features, but she wore a checkered mackinaw, a white

stocking cap, and when for an instant the sunlight had shone on her hair he had caught a glint of gold in it.

The woman was Blanche Devake, of course, he decided. But how could she have reached this place so soon? He and Jackwoon had traveled fast; they had lost no time anywhere, and yet the Devake woman had arrived at this section of the river before them. Naturally, if the Devake woman was here, Blandin and Kelso were also in the vicinity. Was there another waterway through the wilderness, or were they familiar with some trail which had brought them across country?

For a time he hesitated. He paddled slowly toward the point of mainland behind which the woman had disappeared, carefully scanning the shore line on both sides of him, anticipating an ambush.

Nothing happened. The stillness was broken by no sound whatever. There was no breeze. The birds were quiet. The glassy surface of the water was still ruffled slightly by little waves that had been created by the woman's canoe and paddle, and these finally widened into miniature swells that gradually flattened out.

Fallon's hesitation lasted only a few minutes. He was aware of the danger that confronted him. The appearance of Blanche Devake on the river and her instant flight might mean that a trap had been prepared for him. In the brush that fringed the shore near the point behind which the woman had disappeared Blandin and Kelso were probably waiting.

However, they would not need to prepare such a trap, for if they had been informed that he was coming straight down the river they had only to conceal themselves and shoot him as he passed. Besides, he had ob-

served that the woman's fright at sight of him had seemed to be real. She had been so startled that she had rocked the canoe, and with her first stroke had almost dropped the paddle, and she had subsequently displayed every evidence of terror. The canoe had swayed from side to side under the impetus of her splashing and hurried strokes.

Fallon had decided. He drove his canoe to the point of rocks, deftly turned it shoreward, and permitted it to glide into a little bay formed by the rocky point and the mainland. His heavy revolver was in his right hand.

He was a fair target for an enemy on shore, and still nothing happened. The smooth water of the little bay was still slightly ruffled by the passing of the woman's canoe, but the craft and its occupant were not in sight.

The mainland was fringed by a dense growth of various varieties of cedar, pine, spruce, fir, and willows, so wild and thick that a man would have trouble trying to penetrate it. There was a sloping shore line for a short distance which was covered by a rank growth of marsh reeds and wolf willow, but farther on were towering granite rocks in weird and grotesque formation, reaching deep into the mainland.

Fallon's gaze searched the marsh reeds, the willows, the rugged mainland, the rocks of the point around which he had come. He could see no place where a canoe had landed, and yet it must have landed or it would still be on the water.

He could indulge in the grim amusement which had been aroused in him upon the growing conviction that his enemies were not on the shore waiting for him, and there was a faint smile on his lips as he paddled

slowly along the marsh reeds toward the deeper recesses of the bay.

He observed that in the center of the bay there was deep water, and that it continued deep clear to the end of the bay. This unusual condition was explained when he observed that the bottom was composed of huge blocks of rock which had probably been tossed there centuries ago during some gigantic upheaval of the earth. There had been no delta-building stream here, and no alluvial deposits in the flintlike composition of the land by which new land might be built.

He had allowed the canoe to drift until its bow was against the base of a huge rock that formed the end of the bay, and he was again scrutinizing the shore line in an attempt to discover where the canoe had been drawn out when he noticed that the bow of his own craft was no longer against the base of the huge rock. It was slowly but surely drifting toward the mouth of the bay.

He considered this phenomenon. There was no wind, and there should not be enough motion of the water in the bay to cause the canoe to drift, which it certainly was doing. He turned and intently watched the water at the base of the rock, and presently observed that it was definitely and undeniably flowing away from the rock toward the mouth of the bay.

He paddled close to the rock, watching the current, and when the bow of the canoe struck a curtain of willows he was about to back-paddle when he caught a glimpse of water beyond them.

A stroke forward and he was through the willows. There was a triumphant grin on his face as he forced the

canoe through still another curtain of willows and found himself on a smooth, dark stream at the bottom of a gorge.

The gorge was possibly twenty feet wide. Granite walls, straight and tall, rose above him. A hundred feet or so ahead was an abrupt bend. He paddled toward it and discovered that the gorge ran straight north. It did not remain a gorge very far though; at a distance of perhaps half a mile the huge rock formation ended and the stream ran through an open section of country much like that through which he had been traveling for many days. And far away, perhaps a mile, he saw the canoe for which he had been searching. It was in a patch of sunlight, and the paddle was flashing rapidly.

It wasn't a trap; that was certain. For Blanche Devake was doing her best to escape him.

He was puzzled now, but was determined to overtake her. Perhaps it was curiosity that urged him, for he could not understand why, if she and her friends were spying upon him, they had not ambushed him. A shot, and his journey would have been ended. If they had expected him to pass down the river why had not Blandin and Kelso been in the bay with the Devake woman? What sort of strategy were they employing? Why had Blandin and Kelso sent the woman to the river? Obviously they were north of the river or the woman would not be headed in that direction.

His canoe was leaping through the lazy current. He expected that somewhere along the gorge stream the woman would meet Blandin and Kelso. If they were on his trail he may as well meet them at once and settle with them for what they had tried to do to him there

on the island with Jackwoon. Sooner or later they would strike again, and he would rather meet them now, in the daylight, than have them dogging him through the wilderness, to creep upon him while he slept.

He gained upon the woman. Once, after he had paddled about a mile, he saw her pull her canoe from the stream and begin a portage. She was amazingly rapid in her movements, and she handled the canoe easily. He knew that he would have to work hard to overtake her.

When he reached the portage he drew the canoe up, tossed out the two packs—retaining nothing but his rifle, which he carried in his right hand while carrying the canoe over the portage—and was soon sending the lightened craft forward with amazing speed.

He gained steadily, for his paddle dipped more frequently than the woman's, and his strokes were more powerful. Also, his muscles were tireless, and after the pursuit had continued for another two or three miles he was so close that he might have hailed her. But he was silent.

The character of the land had changed very little. They passed through miniature valleys, they went into timber that grew along the shore lines of the stream, they plunged between huge hills and walls of rock and into stretches of level land covered with rich, wild hay. But the general outline of the land was that of a great basin flanked on the east and west by mountainous rock ridges that closed the section from the outside world. Behind them, of course, was the river Fallon had left to enter this place, and the towering walls of rock at that point were impassable to any who had no knowledge

of the secret entrance; while northward was unknown country.

The woman seemed to be tiring rapidly. She plied her paddle more slowly, at times splashing as though too weary to direct her strokes. She presently reached a point where the water grew shallow, where great jagged rocks were strewn so thickly in the bed of the stream that a canoe could not be forced between them. She grounded the canoe.

To Fallon's amazement she did not attempt to make the portage, but leaped from the canoe and started to run into a level which stretched from a huge mound of rocks on the shore.

Fallon's canoe was beached almost as quickly as hers, for he had been only a hundred feet or so behind. He drove it high on the land, leaped out, and ran with mighty strides around the mound of rocks behind which she had vanished.

As he reached the mound of rocks and had a clear view of what was beyond them he halted abruptly.

Seated upon a small stone about a dozen yards from where he had stopped was the woman. Her face was flushed, her bosom was heaving rapidly. She had evidently pulled off her stocking cap, for it was lying on the ground at her feet, and her hair, long and abundant, had cascaded to her shoulders. It gleamed and glinted in the strong sunlight like strands of finely spun gold.

Beyond her, perhaps a hundred yards, was a bend in the stream where the portage ended. Beached on the sloping shore were half a dozen canoes. Half a dozen Indians, bearing caribou spears and belt-axes, were running toward the woman, gibbering excitedly.

Fallon stood, filled with sudden self-derision.

He had blundered and was in for a fight. He was aware of an obscure embarrassment because of the mistake he had made, but he drew his feet together and glanced along the sights of the rifle he still carried.

The woman was not Blanche Devake.

She was younger. A girl. Certainly not more than twenty years old. And the savages who were running toward her were her friends. It was apparent that they had seen her as she came around the mound of rocks, breathless and terrorized, and they they were charging, intent upon protecting and avenging her,

Chapter IX

FALLON'S rifle was rigid and his cheek was against the stock. He took aim at the chest of a giant Indian who had swiftly drawn ahead of the others in the run from the canoes to the woman. He followed the movements of the savage and yet he did not fire. There would still be time when the spearmen passed the woman, who was the object of their concern. At the distance of a dozen yards he would be in danger of their spears, which he knew they hurled with a side motion which produced incredible speed; and yet he held his fire, hoping the woman would act to prevent the threatened clash.

There was wisdom in Fallon's decision. Even before the first savage reached her she was on her feet, facing the spearmen, holding up one hand commandingly and speaking to them sharply in a language that Fallon did not understand.

He was amazed at the effect of her words. Some of the Indians halted so quickly that they went to their knees; while the largest of them—the one whose broad chest had been covered by Fallon's gun—threw himself backward and went down in a heap. His spear fell from his hand and he sat motionless, glaring.

The woman spoke to them again, gently, chidingly; and they grinned with embarrassment and gazed at her

with reverence. But when she turned from them to face Fallon they watched with cold hostility.

She had regained her breath; and as she stood erect and looked at him Fallon lowered his rifle and doffed his cap. This woman—this girl—was a personage.

She was a tall girl—taller than Blanche Devake. Her figure had a fullness which suggested curves without emphasizing them; indicating strength and grace of movement. Her shoulders were broad but not masculine.

She stood coldly watching Fallon, and there was a commanding, authoritative, and challenging gleam in her eyes which would have embarrassed many men in Fallon's position.

Fallon, however, was not affected in that manner. He was aware that he was in the presence of authority; he was ready to concede that he had made a mistake, and as soon as he could he would make a proper apology. But his gaze was never more steady than now, and his admiration could not be concealed. This sturdy, graceful, and regal young woman had stirred in him an emotion that he had never yet experienced.

It was not love at first sight. It was not desire. It was merely a strong man's admiration for one of Nature's masterpieces.

He did not remember having seen a more beautiful young woman.

She was a white girl, and the skin of her face and neck was satiny and flawless with the dusky peach-bloom tint of perfect health. Yet it was not her visible charms that stirred him. It was something deeper and more substantial than these. It was the spirit he glimpsed—the sturdy, courageous heart of her. It shone from her

eyes; he felt it in the poise of her lithe young body, in the set of her head. She was the spirit of the wilderness. Her beauty was the beauty of the animals that roam the forest trails.

But he was moved to silent mirth when, with a movement which was as unconscious as it was feminine, she reached up and brushed aside the mass of hair which the gusty wind had blown over her face. With several deft motions she caught it up, twisted it into various glistening ropes and coils, and tucked it in.

But her gaze was still upon him. Her eyes were clear pools of cold serenity.

Fallon smiled. And Fallon's smile could be very tantalizing. It must have annoyed the girl for she drew herself up haughtily and her eyes flashed angrily.

"You are amused," she said in Fallon's own language. "Tell me what amuses you and we shall both smile." Her voice concealed a taunt, and yet he knew she was perplexed and curious. "Are you amused at my spear-men? That is folly, I assure you, for had I not halted them you would not now be standing there, mocking."

"Not mocking you, miss," returned Fallon with a gentleness that had always been his way with women. "Merely admiring you. I have looked upon many women, and perhaps not one has been as fair as you. And yet all have had the same habit of tucking in the stray wisps of hair that persist in their vagrant ways. It is a truly feminine habit, and a graceful one. That is what brought the smile, miss, and nothing else."

"And why were you trying to catch me?"

"I thought you were another. When last I saw her, she wore garments very like yours."

"Her name!"

"Blanche Devake."

"Is she your friend?"

The girl's eyes were now gleaming with disdain. She was primitive and had not learned to conceal her passions, and so Fallon knew the Devake woman was known and hated.

"I think I may safely name her among my enemies," said Fallon.

The girl gazed straight at him. He was conscious that he was being probed and judged.

"What is your name?" she asked finally.

Fallon told her, and again her gaze searched him.

It was strange to him, a new experience. The green forest and the rocky hills that hemmed him in, the narrow stream of water swirling around the rocks, the sloping beach in the open, the Indians squatted near, armed with spears and axes, the girl standing straight and erect before him—a young and beautiful goddess of the wilderness, quizzing him, a stranger invading her domain.

"What are you doing in this country?" she asked.

He told her.

She caught her breath sharply. She trembled. And then as Fallon watched her he saw a scarlet tide steal up her throat and spread to her cheeks and forehead. Her eyes closed and she swayed. Then the color receded. She stood now, gazing at Fallon fiercely, her lithe young body rigid as she apparently battled with some terrific emotion that had seized her. It was obvious to Fallon that her savage bodyguard was not accustomed to seeing her in this condition, for they were squirming

uneasily and gripping their spears tightly. Their faces were hideous with rage and hatred as they watched Fallon. But Fallon knew they would not attack him.

"How am I to know that you are telling the truth?" she suddenly asked. "You say Lin Underhill's father sent you up here to search for Lin. You say that when you pursued me you thought me to be Blanche Devake. You say Blandin and Kelso are in this country again. Of course they are or Blanche Devake would not be here. But how do I know that you are not lying?"

"How do I know that you are not one of Lin's enemies?" smiled Fallon. "Lin is alive. He was in this valley. You have talked with him. Perhaps you know where he is and are holding him for Blandin and the others."

"You know better than that, Fallon," she answered, straightening proudly. "A moment ago I betrayed myself. I knew that you had read my secret. Lin Underhill was here—in this valley. He was hurt. I brought him back to health. I love him. I hate Blandin and Kelso and the Devake woman, and if I had thought that you were leagued with them against Lin my spearmen would have killed you before now.

"You are a man, Fallon. You are strong. You are shrewd. You are brave. I saw that when you came around the corner of the rocks and saw my spearmen. You were surprised, but no panic overtook you when you observed that you were in a tight place. You even smiled as you laid your cheek against your rifle and aimed at Wattanooka's chest. You like to fight and you do not hesitate to kill. You do not look at me as Blandin looked at me. And yet you may be Blandin's friend."

In a pocket of Fallon's shirt were the photograph of Lin Underwood and the note Lin had written to the guide, Jackwoon, on the day of his supposed death. These Fallon removed from the pocket and gave to the girl, watching her as she eagerly read the note, and observing how her eyes softened and glowed as she looked upon the face in the picture.

After gazing long at the picture she suddenly hugged it to her breast.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, "it is Lin. And that is how Lin writes. And his father must have trusted you to send you after him." She was beaming upon Fallon, but now suddenly she grew cold again and suspicious. "But you are in this country without a guide. And without a guide you would get lost. Fallon, where is your guide?"

He had not told of his experiences since landing at Rossville, and now he briefly reviewed them. And when he finished she watched him steadily for a time without speaking.

"Yes," she finally said, nodding; "it is true. For early this morning from behind a clump of willows far up the river I saw you hurl a heavy rock through the bottom of a canoe. I saw Jackwoon sitting on a rock holding his wounded arm. And then I fled down stream. I paddled swiftly and was far ahead of you. But I lingered too long on the river and you saw me. Jackwoon has sold himself to Blandin and I did not think he could be your guide. But now I believe you. You must go with me to Mercie Valley. It is my home, and my mother's home. There I shall tell you how I came to know Lin Underhill and Blandin and Kelso, and some

others. And I shall tell you about my father—how he came to this country, and what happened to him afterward. It is far,” she added, “but it is in the direction you will go if you are still determined to find Lin Underhill. You will go, Fallon, for you would already have turned back if you were not a brave man, and determined. You will go because you have given your word. And after I have told you the things I will tell you, you will go because of me—because I want you to find Lin and bring him back to me.”

“Yes,” answered Fallon, “I shall go. But first I shall return to the last portage for my packs.”

The girl quickly turned, clapped her hands, and spoke to the squatting Indians. Instantly obeying her, they leaped to their feet, ran to the beach where their canoes lay, seized three of them, returned trotting to the open water above, launched their craft, and sped away.

Fallon watched them for an instant. Then he turned to the girl.

“What is your name?” he asked.

“Gail Hammond.”

“Your Indians love you, Gail,” said Fallon.

“Yes,” she answered simply. “When they saw you standing there aiming your rifle at them they knew you could kill them all. And yet they would have willingly died if I had said the word. Did you observe Wattanooka?”

“The biggest?”

Gail nodded.

“He is as big as you, Fallon. Perhaps he is as strong. He is proud of his strength. If you should do anything to hurt me—you or any other man—Wattanooka

would never quit your trail until he had killed you. Twice he has begged me to let him search for Lin. He hates Blandin."

"Why don't you let him search for Lin?"

"He shall now," said Gail. "He shall go with you."

Chapter X

FALLON'S canoe was portaged, his packs placed in it by the Indians, and paddling steadily he followed in the wake of the other canoes, northward.

Gail Hammond, alone, was in the first canoe. Behind her went Wattanooka, and strung out behind him were the other Indians and Fallon. In each canoe was a pack, indicating that the party had camped, or was prepared to camp. Gail's words "It is far"—referring to the distance that must be traveled to reach her home—suggested the thought that she and her Indians had made many camps in order to reach the spot where Fallon had found them; and there had been evidence that they had camped at that particular portage on the preceding night.

At noon, at another portage, they lunched. The Indians paid no attention to Fallon, and he sat apart from them. The Indians ate dried fish and pemmican. They built no fires for themselves, but Wattanooka caught a small trout and baked it in the embers of a fire for Gail.

The girl smiled at Fallon several times but did not speak to him, treating him as she treated the Indians.

Just before the short twilight came on they were in camp for the night. Fallon estimated they had traveled at least twenty miles.

The character of the country through which they had

passed had changed very little. There were some vast, barren stretches, rolling and rocky; some low-growing timber; swamps; thickets of willow; some poplars. On various sloping ridges and swells was reindeer moss; here and there was a stretch of vivid color where the scarlet poppies reared their heads; occasionally appeared the red *bakneesh*; and between the rocks on the ridges the white snow-flowers. Everywhere sprigs of green had poked tender lances through the earth; and banks and billows of evergreens were dark, solemn coverts where the sunlight did not penetrate. Flung against the skyline on all sides was the high rock wall that shut the valley from the outside world, a ragged, desolate rim grimly guarding this sunken garden spot.

Fallon rigged his canvas shelter against the north wind, built a small fire to keep the winged pests away, lit his pipe and smoked.

As before, he had made his camp at a little distance from the Indians and Gail Hammond. He could see their fires, could overhear their guttural jargon. Several times he observed Gail moving about. Once, just at sundown, and while the light still lasted, he had seen her standing sideways to him, the wind at her back, gazing out into the valley. The dying light struck her oddly, throwing her into relief, revealing her profile and figure with cameolike clearness. He stared, fascinated.

How faithfully she represented the country! He sensed an analogy between her and the country, a concordance of spirit. She harmonized with the wilderness; in her young strength she was as much a part of this primitive land as the saplings that bent their branches

to the wind; she represented youth and strength. She was as frank as Nature itself, concealing nothing; and he had seen, slumbering in her eyes, something of the calm, brooding forests, the clarity of the streams, the hard fixity of the rocks and the yielding, languorous bending of the willows.

He smiled now, remembering that she had not returned Lin's picture and the note he had given her. She had fallen in love with Lin, that was certain, and she hated Blandin and Kelso and the Devake woman, with a passion that she had not been able to conceal.

Fallon was sitting there watching his fire. Darkness had come, although the white light of the north still glowed upon the horizon.

He heard no step, no sound. Yet he sensed a presence and turned his head to see Gail kneeling at the end of his shelter.

In the glow of the firelight her face was serious. Unsmilingly, she said: "I'm coming in; I want to talk."

In this visit was no stealth, no embarrassment, no blushing to reveal consciousness of sex, no apologetic smiling. In her manner was only naturalness and dignity which needed no words to manifest it.

She got into the shelter with him, crossed her hands over her knees, and sighed deeply.

"I've been bothered, thinking about Lin," she said.

"You love him, eh?"

"Yes. I told you so." She looked sideways at Fallon, frankly studying his face for some minutes before she again spoke, saying: "Tell me why Lin's father chose you to search for him?"

Fallon told her that he had never inquired about that.

He had got a telegram from the elder Underhill which had opened negotiations. He had come because he had wanted to come and because he had had nothing else to do at the time.

"Do you get paid for coming?"

"I believe money was not mentioned."

"You have had experience in the North country?"

Seven years in Alaska, British Columbia, the Yukon, he told her.

"You are American."

He acknowledged that, telling her that he had been born in Wyoming.

"You are rich."

He told her that he had all the money he wanted. She persisted with her questions, finally getting from him the statement that he had discovered a rich mine in the Yukon. He had had enough of the country and had got out. Yes, he was restless. There were times when he wanted to go back.

"You had not seen Lin's father until he met you after he had sent for you?"

"That was when I first saw him."

"Someone had told him about you."

"That was the way it was."

"To be talked about that way, you must have done something to make talk."

"Oh, people will talk."

"Yes; if you do something bad. And they won't talk about you if you are only just ordinarily good. But if you have done something very good they will talk about you. What had you done to make them talk about you?"

"Nothing. I had just lived like other people."

She shook her head at the fire.

"That couldn't be," she said sagely. "You wouldn't get talked about. Lin's father wouldn't have sent for you if you had been just like other people. What had you done?"

"Nothing."

"You've done things but you are too modest to talk about them," she said. "That is what I thought when I first talked with you, and that is what I think now. I'm glad you are not boastful. But of course you couldn't be boastful and brave at the same time. Nobody is. You are brave, and of course you will not boast about the things you have done. I think that what Lin's father heard was that you were a very extraordinary man. He wouldn't believe that of a man he had never seen unless he had been told so by more than one man. And so he must have been told about you by more than one. And what he had heard, if told by more than one man, would be true. You are a brave man, and you would like Lin if you should meet him. For Lin is a brave man, too."

She sat silent, gazing at the fire. Her firm young face had lines in it now as she strove with her thoughts and her problems. The stars came out, glittering like gems in the dusky velvet blue of the sky, and the solemn shadows of the forest grew darker and more mysterious. And then, without preface, she told the story of Lin Underhill's visit to the valley.

"There will be no sense in what I am going to tell you unless I begin at the beginning," she said. And this is how, afterward, Fallon remembered it:

Adam Hammond—Gail's father—and a man named Lumly Randall had come into the Hudson Bay country twenty-five years before. They had taken ship from Quebec and had disembarked at Churchill, where they had outfitted for a trip inland. Lumly Randall was a rich man. He had told Adam Hammond that his trip to the Hudson Bay country was to be for the purpose of entering the fur trade in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company. That enterprise might be hazardous, for competition with the Hudson's Bay Company was not thought of by sober-minded men, but Randall intimated that he would have plenty of influential men behind him if it came to a fight with the established company.

Randall built himself a house in the wilderness north of the Fox River. It was an enormous structure of stones that were to be picked up all over the face of the country. There were twenty rooms, secret tunnels and passages, and a tower. The doors were constructed of stout timbers swung on heavy iron hinges and firmly barred; the windows were shuttered with heavy planks. In the stuff that Randall had brought with him—half a ship's cargo, Adam Hammond had said—were two small cannon, some fowling pieces, some two dozen rifles of heavy caliber, some great, long pistols and several of more modern pattern, cutlasses, swords, pikes, and axes. Barrels of gunpowder had been freighted up the river along with the arms.

Adam Hammond had made some remark about these warlike implements, but Randall, a great hulking man of thirty at that time, with one eye—the left—missing, had laughed and kept his silence.

The great house was built, and occupied by Randall. Later, when Randall took a squaw to live with him—a Cree woman whom he bought from the chief of a nomadic tribe—Hammond left him. Indeed, by this time Hammond began to suspect that Randall was something more than a rich man; he began to believe that Randall was a man with a price upon his head. He had made a fortress of the stone house, and his conduct while in it was not that of a man who had been reared a gentleman. There were riotous doings there. There was much drinking and gambling, and the gamblers and drinkers were not the hunters and trappers of the section, nor were they men from the factor's house at Churchill. They were men who drifted in from the outside, from Churchill mostly, and judging from their talk and actions they were seafaring men who had known Randall in his earlier days. Once a woman and a child appeared there. The woman was delicate and thin, emaciated as if by some wasting disease, with dark hollows under her eyes. The child was a girl about two or three years of age—a pretty thing with dark hair and eyes and a disconcerting habit of staring at one.

Hammond had not told Gail what had happened in the big house; he had related no details. But in the main she had gathered that what went on there was wicked enough. And as Hammond had no liking for those things, and as Randall showed no disposition to set about the work of founding a trading post, Hammond left him. Randall laughed at him, but let him go because there had been no definite agreement between them.

Randall had grown disgustingly vulgar and bestial, and it was with great relief that Hammond went his separate way. He went westward into the wilderness, built himself a cabin, and devoted his time to trapping. He prospered at this and sold his furs to the factor at Churchill. Later he met a girl at the trading post, and in the course of time the girl became Hammond's wife, and Gail's mother.

Hammond kept working his way westward. While running his trap lines he prospected a little, and at last on one of his trips into the western wilderness he found this valley. It was a paradise. Hammond had accidentally found a secret entrance to it. He built another cabin and settled his wife—now a mother—in it. He had found the valley inhabited by a tribe of Indians with whom he had made friends. The Indians were Chippewas who had sought independence from a chief who was offensive to them. They had found the valley and for several years they had lived in it without the knowledge of the remainder of the tribe. Most of the Indians living in the valley had known Hammond's wife while she had served the factor at Churchill. They liked and trusted her, and they liked and trusted Adam Hammond. In time they began to look upon him as their leader, and they renounced their tribal rituals and adopted Hammond's God.

They had lived peaceably for several years. And then Hammond, prospecting in the valley, had found gold—free gold in staggering quantity.

Hammond had taken some of the gold to Churchill to have it assayed, and somehow the news got to Randall. Randall swore that he would have half of the

golden treasure because it was he who had brought Adam Hammond to the country, and furthermore between them was a written agreement to the effect that he and Hammond were to share together in all things that they were fortunate enough to find.

But Randall was not able to find Hammond. Word of Randall's ragings had reached Hammond. And so he took no more gold to Churchill or anywhere else. He left it where he had found it, in the valley. And there it had remained until this day.

But Hammond had made one mistake. He had not told his wife or daughter where he had found the gold, and he had left with them no diagram or map of the section in which he had found it. He had kept the secret to himself.

And then one day he had set out for Rossville to get some supplies. Wattanooka had gone with him. They had been absent several days when one morning Wattanooka returned, alone. He was paddling his canoe with one arm—the other was broken, the hand smashed. There were wounds all over his body, and a great gash on the top of his head where he had evidently been struck with some heavy weapon.

In the bottom of the canoe was a strange white man who was later identified, by himself, as Linton Underhill. Underhill was unconscious and used up about as badly as Wattanooka. Adam Hammond had been killed.

Later Wattanooka told the story. He had reached a place called Big Tree Portage on the way to Rossville. Wattanooka was carrying the canoe and Hammond was behind him, with a light pack. In a spot where there

was some dense undergrowth he heard Hammond call out sharply. He dropped the canoe and turned, to see Hammond struggling with half a dozen men—whites and Indians. He leaped forward to help Hammond and was met by a spear thrust from the brush. From another point he received a second spear or an arrow, and then others—he did not know how many. Then a blow on the top of the head, and he knew nothing more until he awakened to see a number of Indians and white men sitting in a circle around Hammond. The white men were Blandin, Kelso, a big, evil-eyed stranger who was called Revella, and Lin Underhill. It was the first time that Wattanooka had seen any of the men, but while lying there motionless and conscious he had heard all their names spoken. He had identified them, one after the other, for there were thoughts of vengeance in his heart.

Underhill and Hammond were bound. Jackwoon was there, among the Indians. The Indians were silent, while the white men talked. The white men were questioning Hammond about his gold. And Hammond would not answer.

They tortured Hammond. They placed glowing embers upon his arms and legs and sat there grinning cruelly as the embers seared Hammond's flesh. They prodded him with spears and arrows and inflicted unmentionable cruelties upon him.

But Hammond would not talk. Wattanooka had no power over his muscles. They would not respond to his will. He was forced to lie there and listen.

After a while the white men left Hammond. They went away in canoes, leaving the Indians to guard

Hammond. They were gone a long time, and while they were away Hammond, who had fainted, regained consciousness and talked with Lin Underhill. Wattanooka overheard them.

Hammond asked Underhill many questions. Hammond told Underhill about his wife and daughter, about the hidden valley, how to find the entrance to it, and about the gold—where it would be found. He got Underhill to promise that he would find the valley, apprise his wife and daughter of what had happened to him, and tell them about the gold. He thought Wattanooka was dead. But Wattanooka was not dead. He could not talk or move. But his ears had been awake, he said.

Hammond told Underhill that he had received a death wound. A spear had bitten him more deeply than had been intended. He could feel his life going.

When Hammond's captors returned Hammond was dead. There was a great deal of cursing, and in a fury his body was thrown into the brush to be devoured by wolves.

The white men released Underhill. Blandin and Revella, standing near Underhill, laughed and told him to take Jackwoon and resume his travels. It seemed to Wattanooka that Underhill and Jackwoon had accidentally come upon Blandin and his crew just as Hammond had been attacked.

Underhill told Blandin and Revella that he would be glad to part from such company. Blandin and Revella continued to laugh at Underhill. They were near to blows though, for Underhill's contempt was strong and his words were bitter. He called to Jackwoon,

turned his back to Blandin and Revella, and began to walk away.

Then Blandin and Revella shot him. In the back. Both took deliberate aim with their pistols. Underhill fell, face down. Revella walked to him, kicked him several times in the side and the face, and left him. They all went away then, leaving Hammond and Underhill and Wattanooka for dead.

Wattanooka did not die, though for two or three days it seemed he would. Nor did Underhill die.

Here Wattanooka boasted a little. His pride in himself was excusable though, for never had Gail Hammond seen a man more terribly wounded.

Consider, she told Fallon. Wattanooka's body bore a dozen wounds. His left arm was broken. The hand was smashed. They found three deep spear wounds in him, together with half a dozen knife and arrow wounds. He had managed to bury Hammond, he had kept Underhill from dying, he had got Underhill into his canoe and had paddled all that distance with one good arm. Wattanooka was a strong man. He was the strongest man in the country. His strength was acknowledged and he was proud of it.

But he had almost been retaken by the two white men—Revella and Blandin. He had traveled by night, fearing to meet the white men again, and one night while slipping down the river in his canoe he had seen a campfire on an island, had paddled his canoe gently into some willows, and had heard the white men talking. They had been told by one of the Indians—who understood a little English—that Hammond had talked to

Underhill about the gold; and they were going back to the scene of the tragedy in the hope of finding Underhill still alive. If he was still living it was their plan to restore him to health and make him talk.

They had not succeeded in finding Underhill then, of course, but they must have suspected that both he and Wattanooka had survived and escaped, for their bodies were not where they had been left. Indeed, they would be sure that Underhill and Wattanooka were still alive if they had found where Wattanooka had buried Hammond. And finally, while Underhill was regaining his strength, word reached Gail that they had found Hammond's grave and that they knew Wattanooka and Underhill had escaped them.

And then, after Underhill recovered and became strong again, he decided to complete his work, and with Wattanooka to guide him he again set out to explore the wilderness. One day after Wattanooka had returned to camp from a hunt he found the camp wrecked and Underhill gone. He trailed Underhill for several days. Underhill had been captured by a large party—of Indians and white men. Once Wattanooka had seen Underhill, but had not been able to rescue him, for there had been too many in the party and Underhill had been too well guarded. He had lurked near, however, and had seen Underhill taken to the Randall house. He had even approached the house several times, hoping for an opportunity to get near Underhill, but the great stone walls and the forbidding atmosphere of the place had awed him and he had returned to the valley, bearing his ill news.

"Wattanooka is not afraid of men," Gail concluded. "He is afraid of things he does not understand."

"How long is it since Lin disappeared?" asked Fallon.

"That was six months ago. It was in the winter. But there was a thaw, and Lin was restless. He said there was but little for him to do, and he wished to go out in the spring."

"He told you where the gold might be found?"

"Yes. I have seen the place."

She clasped her hands over her knees and gazed into the fire, which had burned low. Fallon sat, steadily puffing at his pipe.

"Do you think Lin is still alive?" asked Fallon.

"Yes. He is alive. And he has not told them where to find the gold."

"How do you know that?"

Gail touched her breast. "Something here tells me he is still alive," she said. "And if he had told them where to find the gold they would have come here to get it," she added. "For they know about the secret entrance to the valley—the one that Father found when he came here. They would come and search for the gold but they are afraid of my Indians and the search would take too long. While they were searching Wattanooka and my Indians would kill them."

"When did you see Blanche Devake?"

"I saw her one day from the water entrance to the valley—the place where you came in. She was in a canoe with Blandin. She is too bold to be a woman."

The darkness had grown intense and Fallon's fire had gone out. He and the girl sat for a long time, say-

ing nothing. And then she said she would go to her tent. Fallon said good-night to her and heard her move away in the darkness.

And then, almost instantly, he heard her voice within a few feet of the shelter.

"Wattanooka!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

There was amazement in her voice, and stern accusation. It was apparent to Fallon that she was indignant over finding the Indian so close to Fallon's shelter. She had obviously given him no orders to spy upon the white man.

"Me come watch," explained Wattanooka. His voice was sullen but respectful.

"Why?" asked Gail sharply.

"No like white man," returned the Indian. "Come see don't hurt Gail."

The girl laughed, and went away into the darkness. She must have taken the Indian with her, because Fallon did not hear him again.

Wattanooka was an enemy. But that fact disturbed Fallon very little. It amused him rather. For he smiled as he stretched himself on his bed of pine boughs.

Chapter XI

AT DAWN the next morning Fallon emerged from his shelter, ran a hand through his tousled hair, filled his lungs with the sharp morning air, buckled on his cartridge belt and six-shooter, leaped into his canoe, and paddled down the stream. At a distance of half a mile was a wide, deep spot in the river which was an ideal place for a swim. He had observed it the day before when they had passed it to reach the camp. It was hidden from the camp by several wooded bends in the stream; and there was an excellent sand beach that sloped gently to the water.

There was no movement at the camp, no fires. All the canoes were drawn up on the shore. When Fallon rounded the first bend in the little river, he could not have been seen by anyone who might have been watching him.

He reached the deep water, took off his clothes and laid them carefully upon a boulder near the edge, and for about ten or fifteen minutes swam about in the pool.

The water was warmer than the air, which had an edge of frost in its touch. It was comfortable, and for a time he floated, lying on his back and idly gazing into the gray morning sky, which was gradually taking on a blue tint. A light, fleecy mist swam in the forest, wreathing and winding about among the branches of the trees

in long, stringy wisps which strangely reminded him of the scolding locks of slattern women he had seen.

To be sure, Nature did have its feminine aspects and moods. For when it was most seductive and appealing it was most dangerous. Once before he had had the same thought. He was trying to remember just when and where he had had it when he observed that he had drifted into shallow water close to some rocks. He turned over to swim back into deeper water and observed that he had company.

Wattanooka had driven his canoe into the pool while Fallon had been idly floating on his back. He had beached the canoe, and at the moment Fallon became aware of him he was standing on the sandy beach removing his knee-length deerskin trousers—the only garment he wore besides his moccasins.

Wattanooka was a magnificently proportioned man, and as Fallon swam slowly toward the head of the pool he gazed at the Indian with the critical interest of a sculptor seeking imperfections in a work he has created.

So far as Fallon could see, Nature had made no mistakes in creating Wattanooka. His muscles were long, smooth, and were laid in a rippling sheath all over his body, except at the stomach where they formed two low, flat ridges. He was a giant in stature, but was so gracefully built that he seemed no taller than an ordinary man. But there was tremendous strength in the thick, sloping muscles of his shoulders, in the great, smooth arm muscles, and in the firm-looking thighs and calves of his legs. As he stood upon the beach, naked, he looked like a figure that had been carved out of red granite by a master.

For a savage, he was handsome. He had a good forehead, which was higher than the average of his race; his nose was well-shaped, except that the bridge was a little too high, giving it a slightly hooked appearance; his chin was the broad chin of a fighter, and his mouth was straight and firm. His eyes, which were black and set deep in their sockets, were uncompromisingly sullen, perhaps with some secret passion which tortured his primitive mind.

He did not look at Fallon. And he seemed to know the pool, for he dove into it and disappeared, to emerge as noiselessly as a seal, with his black hair sleek upon his head, and his black eyes upon Fallon.

Remembering that Wattanooka had told Gail he did not like him, Fallon kept a watchful eye upon the Indian, though he pretended to ignore him and did not cut short his swim.

Wattanooka did not appear to be meditating mischief, although it was certain that he was somewhat critically watching Fallon's movements. His interest in Fallon seemed to be speculative; he watched the white man as he might have watched another man disporting himself in the water, estimating his strength, his skill, and his manner of handling himself. Fallon was certain there was no passion in the Indian's watchfulness, for the sullen eyes were now alight with an expression that might have been interpreted as curiosity.

When Fallon, refreshed and reinvigorated, finally swam to the sloping beach and stood erect in the shallow water, he was aware that Wattanooka had ceased swimming and was watching him, and if Fallon had admired the magnificent figure of the Indian, Watta-

nooka was no less obvious in his admiration of the white man.

For Fallon was a perfect match for the savage. As he stood there on the beach with the water glistening on him there was only the difference in the color of the skin between them. Had the two been standing side by side, the Indian would have been taller than Fallon, but the white man's muscles were as clearly defined, his shoulders were as broad, and his strength was quite as apparent.

Yet there was something more in Fallon—something that Wattanooka lacked. It was consciousness of a superiority which was mental, physical, and spiritual. Of the two nude men who were now facing each other in this primitive environment, one carried in his heart the invincible courage and determination of a long line of conquerors; while the other, equally strong, was a son of a race whose fathers had met defeat after defeat in the long-drawn battle for possession of the frontiers. Wattanooka was sure of his physical strength. He had as much courage as the white man. What he lacked was the confidence possessed by his white brother—the confidence amounting almost to contempt—which gleamed in Fallon's eyes as they now met the Indian's.

Fallon had finally become convinced that Wattanooka's interest in him was hatred. His words of last night to Gail, "No like white man," coupled with the significant fact that the Indian had followed him to the pool, aroused Fallon to a cold, grim amusement which the imminence of physical violence could change to ruthless and merciless action.

Fallon was not the man to seek to postpone the inevitable clash with an enemy, and if Wattanooka hated him and wished to satisfy his hatred in a physical encounter, now was the time for it. And now Fallon, having made his decision, took the initiative.

"Wattanooka," he said, "you followed me."

The Indian swam slowly toward Fallon, reached the sandy, sloping bottom, walked up it until he stood within two or three paces of the white man, folded his great arms over his chest, and spoke slowly.

"Wattanooka follow white man," he said. "Wattanooka hear white man talk with Gail. Gail tell white man about Blandin, Kelso, Revella, Underhill. Gail say much. White man say little. Wattanooka Gail's friend. What white man want here?"

"The white man's talk is for Gail Hammond's ears alone," returned Fallon. "Wattanooka is like the serpent: he hides in the grass."

The Indian's face flushed under its copper tint. But he drew himself erect.

"Wattanooka Gail's friend," he said steadily. "Wattanooka not know white man. Find out what white man want. Find out what white man come here for."

In the Indian's eyes something besides hatred was glowing. Loyalty to his mistress was there, and determination, together with a certain wistfulness. A blending of many emotions. Interpreted by Fallon, the look meant that if Fallon's errand to the country was one of friendliness to Gail Hammond there could be no hatred between the two men, but if Fallon meant harm to the girl there must be a definite settlement now. One or the other would stay at the pool.

Fallon studied the Indian. He had no wish to kill a man merely because of a misunderstanding, yet he was reluctant to concede that Wattanooka had any right to question him. But the fine loyalty of the savage to his mistress impressed him.

Wattanooka met his gaze with a steadiness that indicated his unalterable determination. And Fallon smiled.

"White man came here to help Gail Hammond find Lin Underhill," he said. "That is all. White man will talk no more to Wattanooka."

The Indian's eyes flashed. His lips curved into a smile of friendliness. His great chest swelled. He extended his right hand in the white man's greeting, and after an instant Fallon seized it, gripping it firmly.

They stood there for an instant longer, searching each other's eyes while they tightened the bond between them, while the morning light, now white and clear, shone on their dripping bodies—one as red and hard as the granite rocks near him; the other equally hard, seeming to have been hewn out of the white marble of an alien country.

And now, under the influence of a common interest, the miracle of a swift friendship dawned. As Wattanooka's eyes roved over Fallon's rugged and muscular body, glistening with the beads of water that still clung to it, the sullenness went entirely out of his eyes and was replaced by a gleam of frank admiration.

He squeezed Fallon's hand harder.

"You strong," he said.

Fallon watched the play of the muscles of the Indian's arm, but he said nothing.

"Wattanooka strong, too," said the Indian. "Wattanooka strongest man in country," he added.

Primitive pride such as this Fallon had met before. It was prevalent wherever young men congregated. Pride of strength had once been strong in Fallon. There had been times when, with other young men of his age, he had pitted his strength against theirs in physical contests. That had been years ago, of course, and he had learned that such contests merely supplied an outlet for excess physical and nervous energy. Increasing age had tempered Fallon's impulses with conservatism and caution, and now he was reluctant to make any claims for himself. And yet Wattanooka's boast had touched him. It was impossible for him to hold back the words that came to his lips:

"Wattanooka speaks loudly. If Wattanooka's muscles are as strong as his voice he is a great man."

The Indian smiled confidently.

"We shall see," he said. "At our feet is the water. It will be soft to the back of the one that strikes it."

He wanted to wrestle. And Fallon knew a great many of the white man's tricks at that game.

There was no word between them as they moved about in the shallow water feinting for holds. The Indian was swift and elusive, and his muscles were leathery. Three times Fallon's arms went around him, and three times he slipped away.

They moved out of the water to the sandy beach, and there, chest to chest, they met, striving for holds. The Indian, having little knowledge of the science of the game, might now have become a victim of Fallon's tricks. But Fallon put none of them into execution, for

he had a desire to test Wattanooka's mettle. And so, adopting the latter's tactics, he pitted strength against strength.

They stood erect, their arms locked, each seeking to force the other to take a backward step. This was Wattanooka's idea of victory—to force his adversary backward. Sheer force.

Fallon understood. His feet sank into the sand, but they went no deeper than Wattanooka's. The great muscles of his back and thighs grew and expanded into rocklike ridges as he braced himself against the Indian's tremendous strength; and once his shoulders began to bulge backward from the strain. Then the rocklike muscles began to writhe and squirm under the white skin. They grew knotted; they crawled into bunches around his shoulder blades, along his neck, down his thighs, and at his hips. And slowly he straightened the red giant until the latter's body was almost perpendicular.

Wattanooka's feet began to slide in the sand. He would take no backward step, but strive as he might he could not stop the backward movement of his body.

Fallon, now grim and determined, and aroused by the sheer delight of battle, resorted to science. He had tested Wattanooka's strength and had found it to be great, though not as great as his own. And now, thinking to end the contest, he turned swiftly sideways to the red man, locked one of his arms under his own, swiftly bent his own body forward, and threw Wattanooka a dozen feet out into the stream, into the deep water.

Wattanooka landed on his back, and the water

splashed high as he vanished. Fallon got one look at his face as it disappeared beneath the surface, and saw amazement and chagrin depicted there. He was prepared to see the Indian emerge in a fighting rage; but when Wattanooka's face quickly appeared it was wreathed in a smile.

He slowly swam into shallow water, got to his feet, and waded to the beach, where he stood for an instant, looking at the white man. There was still no rage in him, only embarrassment. His boast of strength had not been vindicated.

However, he offered no excuse. There was frank admiration in the glance he gave Fallon.

"You strong," he said. "Mebbe stronger than Wattanooka. Know trick that Wattanooka not know. Look!"

He strode to a rock that was embedded in the sand of the beach. He heaved at it and wrenched it out. The rock, Fallon estimated, weighed about a hundred pounds, but Wattanooka lifted it over his head with little effort, poised it there for an instant and then threw it a dozen feet. He marked the place in the sand where he had stood to throw the rock; then marked the spot where the rock had fallen. Then he looked smilingly at the white man.

Fallon lifted the rock and swung it above his head with both hands, as Wattanooka had done. He stood on the mark that the Indian had made, and the ridges of muscle over his abdomen stretched and squirmed and contracted as he bent his body backward to muster his strength for the throw. The rock landed about three feet beyond where it had fallen for Wattanooka.

The Indian flushed beneath the copper-tinted skin of his face, but he smiled.

And now he devised still another test of strength. It appeared he was not satisfied. He dragged the two canoes into the water and lashed their noses together with a rope. Then he got into his own, kneeled on the bottom, and took up a paddle, motioning Fallon to do the same.

Fallon had played this game, also. With the bows of the canoes locked the two contestants were to paddle until one forced the other backward to a distance far enough to determine supremacy. A strong man might win in the two trials which had just been concluded, but skill as well as strength would be needed to determine the winner of the paddling contest.

They manipulated the canoes to the center of the stream, and poised their paddles until Wattanooka gave the word.

Their muscles swelled and leaped, and the water of the pool churned and foamed in a fury of agitation. Around and around went the canoes, their prows creaking and groaning as they clashed together; and for a quarter of an hour they strove with no apparent advantage to either. Fallon was aglow with the joy of this contest of strength and skill, but Wattanooka's face was somber and grim, and his paddle hissed as it flashed in and out of the water.

It was skill rather than strength that counted this time, and although Fallon's paddle seemed to be driven with as much power and rapidity as the Indian's, it was Fallon's canoe that at last began to move backward.

At first the movement was only just perceptible, an inch now and then, with periods between in which it held its own. There was no diminution in the rapidity of the strokes of either, or in the power with which the strokes were wielded. But Wattanooka's strokes were the more skillful, and finally, slowly, gradually, Fallon's craft was forced down stream.

And then, realizing his defeat, Fallon did the graceful thing. He suddenly lifted his paddle aloft in token of surrender, and raised his voice full-throatedly in a cry of admiration for Wattanooka's skill and strength.

The Indian immediately ceased paddling and leaned forward, his somberness gone, his teeth flashing in a broad smile. And yet for a time they said nothing more, for both were weary from their mighty efforts.

Their canoes drifted down stream until they came to rest against some rocks at the narrow entrance to the pool. And there for a time they sat resting, breathing the sharp morning air into their exhausted lungs.

And at last Wattanooka spoke.

"You good man," he said, panting. "You no act foolish when lose."

"Am I less than my red brother?" answered Fallon. Wattanooka's eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"My white brother is a brave man," he said. "Wattanooka is proud to know him. You stronger than Wattanooka. I win because I know trick with paddle."

"We are even there," laughed Fallon, "for I know some wrestling tricks."

The Indian shook his head, and his black eyes gleamed again.

"You fair," he said. "Trick won with paddle, and

maybe with wrestling. But no trick won throwing rock. You win wrestling without trick. I feel you strong. But almost I lose with paddle, anyway."

There was respect in the Indian's voice and in his manner when at last they stepped upon the beach. They dressed and sat down, facing each other, and without preface Wattanooka related the story of Adam Hammond's death at the hands of Blandin and his party.

It was evident to Fallon—who had already heard the story from Gail—that Wattanooka had not related everything that had happened that day. To Fallon, listening attentively, and using his imagination upon points that were only lightly touched by the Indian, it appeared that Blandin and Kelso, and the other man—Revella—were fiends.

Wattanooka's eyes burned with rage as he finished the tale and sat there looking at Fallon.

"Blandin strong man," he said. "Not strong as you. Strong as Wattanooka, mebbe. Some day kill him. Choke him tongue out. Break him neck! Revella no big man. Him tall. Like sapling. Like fox. Like serpent. You meet him some day. Step on neck. When you go to big house for Underhill?"

"As soon as I can get away from Gail."

"She let you go plenty soon. She love Underhill. Her days are long, and her nights are longer. You go alone to stone house?"

"No."

"Who go along you?"

"I don't know."

Wattanooka smiled engagingly.

"You know," he said. "You talk double tongue."

White man no fight Indian except to kill. I come to pool. I big talk. I say me strong. You wrestle. You throw big rock. You paddle canoe. Why? You want see if Wattanooka strong enough to go with you. It is good. I go."

Fallon grinned.

"Wattanooka is like the fox," he said. "He did not come to the pool to talk big, but to show his strength so that Fallon would take him to the stone house. Well; you go."

The Indian's chest swelled with pride, but he sat motionless otherwise, evidently restraining himself. But there was now no mistaking the expression in his eyes as he looked at the white man—they were worshipful.

Chapter XII

AN HOUR later the little fleet of canoes was again traversing the narrow stream that ran northward. Gail Hammond led the way, with the others trailing her. Fallon's canoe was directly behind Gail's, with Wattanooka's close. Wherever the width of the stream permitted, the giant Indian would force his canoe alongside the white man's; and he would talk to Fallon. He told Fallon various things about the country in the valley; he pointed out salient features; he answered some questions that Fallon put to him—questions about the tribe that inhabited the valley: their pursuits, their number, the amount and quality of the game.

Wattanooka was intelligent. His knowledge of English had been imparted to him by Hammond, and then by Gail when she had grown old enough to become his teacher. Gail was "White Bird" to Wattanooka. It was a name he used when talking about her with the other members of the tribe; and by that name the Indians knew her.

Wattanooka was the nominal chief, but the actual authority was vested in Gail since the death of her father. Her mother had never interested herself with the Indians. They loved and respected her and obeyed her orders without question. But they had loved Hammond, and they worshiped Gail—the white bird who

had ministered to them when sickness smote them, and who sympathized with them in time of trouble.

Adam Hammond had brought some books with him into the valley, and he had sent outside for others. Between Hammond and his wife and the books, Gail had acquired an education. From her books she had also learned some of the little amenities of life. Her quick mind, absorbing the verbal pictures of history and fiction, had built a fanciful structure of conduct and manners which answered well. Her reading, however, had not helped her to govern the primitive impulses that occasionally manifested themselves, nor had her father and mother ever succeeded in polishing some of her crudities of speech. Her frankness was sometimes devastating.

Late that afternoon they paddled out of the stream into a small lake. The lake was about a mile and a half long and perhaps three quarters of a mile wide. It was in the center of a gently sloping country that stretched away from it for several miles to the north and the east and the west; and where the sloping land ended were high and massive barriers of natural rock and bald and forbidding mountain peaks that isolated the valley from the outside world. Later, Fallon discovered that for many miles upon all sides the country was so rocky and inaccessible that none of the Indians in the vicinity ever attempted to explore it. They were awed and frightened by the silence that reigned over it, and by some fearsome legends that were associated with it.

Yet the valley was a paradise. The land was fertile, and produced several varieties of grain in abundance

despite the shortness of the growing season. And even its winters were not as severe as in the higher land that encompassed it, for the high rock barrier formed a windbreak which shunted the wild storms upward.

On the north bank of the lake, sheltered by a gigantic rock overhang that swept outward in a huge arc for more than a hundred feet, were a number of log cabins which were inhabited by the Indians. They were built on a level facing the lake, and there was an orderliness in their appearance that suggested care and pride.

At the eastern end of the lake was a larger cabin. This, Fallon rightly concluded, was where Gail lived with her mother. From its appearance the cabin contained several rooms. There was a large stone chimney sticking above the center of the roof, which was of the type known as the gable. The roof sloped toward the front of the house and covered a wide porch. There were several smaller buildings behind the cabin.

The cabin stood on a slope against a background of evergreens. There was a log wharf at the edge of the lake in front of the cabin, and several canoes were in the water. It was evident that Adam Hammond had lavished a great deal of care and attention upon his habitation. Around it were winding walks margined by small rocks of uniform size. There were flower gardens, hedges, climbing vines and roses. Hanging baskets of flowers swung from the porch ceiling. Back at the edge of the bank of evergreens were long tiers of cordwood.

The party landed, and Fallon stood on the log wharf, gazing about him in astonishment. The country around him looked like a prosperous farming section, and in its wilderness setting it was amazingly beautiful. From

where he stood on the wharf he could see field after field of grain, and several patches of garden truck. In the distance, upon the side of a slope which was sheltered by the high rock wall, was a small orchard. Farther along was a fenced pasture in which several cows were grazing. The grain was not tall, and the garden truck appeared to be dwarfed; yet he knew both would bear by the time the brief season ended.

The establishing of this farm had entailed work and patience unlimited, and Fallon had an instant revelation of Adam Hammond's character, of his determination, of his thriftiness and persistence.

The Indians, under the direction of Wattanooka, unloaded the canoes, carried the packs to the porch of the cabin, and silently vanished into their own houses. There had been only women and children among those who from the Indian village watched the approach of the fleet of canoes, for the men were all at work in the fields; and now that Wattanooka and his followers had vanished there were only Gail and Fallon. Presently they were on the porch, and Fallon was being presented to Mrs. Hammond.

Adam Hammond's widow was a small woman, almost slight. But there was a patient steadiness in her eyes and a quiet indomitability in her manner that Fallon knew was characteristic of women of the wilderness. They were fully aware of the hazards they faced, yet they were not afraid.

Fallon was accepted without ceremony. He stood for a moment gripping Mrs. Hammond's hand while the woman's gaze probed his and roved briefly over him. She smiled a little, as though to let him know she ap-

proved of him. And Fallon's answering smile completed the bond between them.

She listened attentively while Gail explained Fallon's presence in the country, and she looked straight at Fallon when the girl concluded the story of their meeting at the water entrance to the valley, and their subsequent conversations and experiences.

Gail omitted nothing, and at the end Mrs. Hammond's eyes glowed softly and approvingly as she met Fallon's gaze.

"Yes," she said quietly, "you are a man. One can see that."

And now Gail went into the house. Presently they heard her voice at a distance. Apparently she was talking with one of the Indians.

Mrs. Hammond had motioned Fallon to a chair and she was now sitting in another, facing him, quietly questioning him. And at the sound of Gail's voice she said, slowly:

"Gail is a beautiful girl."

"I have seen none more beautiful."

"She loves Lin Underhill."

"I can understand why. Lin Underhill is a fine-looking man. If he is anything like his father he is a real man."

"He is not as tall as you," said Mrs. Hammond, "nor as broad. Nor is there in him the romance that there is in your appearance. You have seen a great deal of life, young man; and it has not spoiled you. You are an adventurer. The wild passions are in you, but they are governed by high ideals. Yet when you want a woman you will take her. Do you want Gail?"

"I do not want Gail," answered Fallon, steadily meeting her eyes.

"Then Gail is safe. If you wanted her I should be afraid for her."

She had other questions to ask. Quietly, gently, she led him to talk about himself. And Fallon, usually taciturn, but now led by the appealing charm of the woman who had won Adam Hammond, was not reluctant to tell her things about himself that he had not told to anyone.

And Mrs. Hammond, won by Fallon's simple directness, gave to him the story of her life in this wild country. She added details to the tale that Gail had told him about Lumly Randall, and because of her greater knowledge and experience the story took on a newer and more terrible significance.

Lumly Randall, she said, was a former pirate. With men as bloodthirsty as himself, he had roamed the Southern seas; and his devil's crew had boarded and sunk many a fair prize. There were stories of women who had been captured by Randall, of men forced to walk the plank, of captives borne to distant lands and sold into slavery. All these tales were true, she assured Fallon, for she had sat many nights in the storeroom of the factor's building at Churchill and listened to them.

The wonder of it was that Randall was not apprehended. But she had heard him boast that there were none who dared to turn him over to the law, for he knew things about men in high places that would convict them of guilt as great as his own.

And the telling of these things stirred Fallon greatly. For it seemed to him that, beckoning to him, were

romance and danger and high adventure such as he had not yet encountered. And as he sat and listened to the woman his blood ran hot and cold in his veins. His great chest swelled, his lips parted, and his eyes flashed with eagerness.

And the woman, having been married to a brave man, and knowing this man better, perhaps, than he knew himself, smiled her quiet, patient smile and watched him with her steady eyes, knowing that he would gravitate to the old stone house in the wilderness as surely as metal yields itself to the magnet.

They sat there long, while the shadows of night gathered them in. They could hear the waters of the lake gently lapping the shore; there were times when they could hear the voices of the savages in the little village chanting their crude songs. Gail did not appear to them again. And Mrs. Hammond, interested in Fallon as she might have been interested in a great, strong son that she had borne, continued to talk with him. At last she talked of Wattanooka, and then Fallon laughingly told her of the meeting between the Indian and himself, and of how subtly Wattanooka had gained his permission to accompany him on his search for Lin Underhill. After he had told Mrs. Hammond about the contests at the pool the woman laughed lowly.

"I should have liked to see that," she said. "For Wattanooka is famous for his strength. But both you and Wattanooka will need all the strength you have. And you will need more than strength. You will need cunning and stealth and fleetness of foot and quickness of eye. You will need still more. You will need the grace of God."

Chapter XIII

ON THE morning of the third day following his appearance at the Hammond home Fallon and Wattanooka entered the evergreen forest at the rear of the cabin. Mrs. Hammond and Gail watched them go. The Indian preceded Fallon into the evergreens, for they were going out of the valley through the secret passage that would lead them into the wild country in which the stone house was situated, and Wattanooka knew the trail.

There was no trail that Fallon could see, and yet Wattanooka strode ahead confidently, holding a northeasterly direction except when some natural barrier intervened. Then he would swerve just enough to pass the obstruction. The trail, the Indian explained, was never used except in emergencies. No man could follow it unless he had threaded it before, and not even then unless he carefully marked the various salient features he passed. Wattanooka adjured Fallon to make use of his eyes, explaining that if he—Wattanooka—failed to return, Fallon would have need of his knowledge.

The forest was solemn and somber, and its floor was carpeted with the soft, moist mold of leaves and spikes of spruce and lacelike sprigs of cedars of numberless varieties. Wood flowers dotted the little natural clearings they crossed; and newly mated moosebirds fluttered in front of them, scolding over their intrusion.

Game trails ran here and there, but Wattanooka followed none of them.

The trend of the land was upward, a slight rise which grew rocky as they proceeded. Fallon, alert, devoted his attention to various unusual formations of rock, realizing that if he were compelled to return alone he would have to depend upon these marks to guide him. For the forest itself disclosed no salient features.

Fallon and the Indian were traveling light. The canoes had been left behind. Upon Fallon's back was a light pack containing his canvas shelter, a small store of provisions, and a few cooking utensils. In his pockets were a number of cartridges for the rifle he carried and for the .45 Colt in the holster at his right hip. Around him was a cartridge belt studded with other cartridges.

Wattanooka likewise carried a small pack and a rifle. He carried no revolver. At his belt was a long, ivory-hafted *kiliutok* knife and behind him a fluted belt-ax. His only clothing were the deerskin trousers, knee-length and broad at the bottoms, and a pair of moose-hide moccasins. His coppery skin, tough as the deerskin that clothed him, was impervious to clutching, thorn-like twigs and branches that scraped him as he made his way through them.

They were many hours getting through the forest. But at last the trees thinned out and they began to thread a section in which great rocks and boulders seemed to have been thrown by some mighty power. Some titanic upheaval of the earth or the crushing of the great rock barrier above them during the glacial period had created this chaos; and at first Fallon doubted that there was a trail through it.

However, Wattanooka did not hesitate. He slipped swiftly between and around the gigantic rocks until he found a channel that appeared to be of natural construction. At first it was only a few feet deep, but as the Indian continued to follow it the rock walls beside it grew higher, and the channel deeper, until it became a chasm with perpendicular sides.

The bottom was of smooth, moss-covered rock. For a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile they followed it. Then they reached and pursued some angles and were smothered with an impenetrable darkness.

They were more than an hour in traversing the dark passageway. Wattanooka kept guiding Fallon with his voice, and Fallon kept close to him. And after a while the darkness lifted a little and a beam of light far in front of them indicated that they were approaching an outlet. When they finally stood in the open, blinking against the white light of the morning, they were through the high rock barrier which rimmed the valley, but were in a desolate, rocky section beyond which was still another barrier.

Wattanooka found a second channel. Without the Indian's knowledge of the trail it would have taken them many hours to climb the tortuous rocks that were piled in wild confusion between them and the final barrier. Fallon wondered how Adam Hammond had found the trail.

The second barrier was not as thick as the first, but they were longer getting through it, because there was no subterranean passage to take them, and they were forced to thread narrow ledges that angled here and there through breaks in the rock wall, and into crevasses

where there was no footing, and where they had to suspend their weight on their arms and hands or brace their feet against the sides. They descended gradually until they were again at the base of the barrier, and after zigzagging here and there through various breaks and channels they suddenly emerged into a thicket of willows at the edge of another forest.

It was long after noon now, and the continual climbing had tired them. Yet they went on steadily, and dusk found them deep into the virgin timber.

At a small stream that ran through a swale at the edge of a glen they erected their shelter for the night. Wattanooka built a small fire over which he hovered to do the cooking while Fallon bathed in the stream.

"No more fire," said the Indian, as with Fallon he sat smoking while the glowing embers of the fire dimmed and died. "This Cree country. Mebbe here—mebbe not here. Who can tell?"

Lying in the shelter, netted against the insects that buzzed around in search of them, the two men talked, their voices pitched low.

Wattanooka had asked about Fallon's trip into the country, and Fallon had told him, even to his finding of the water entrance to the valley. The Indian listened attentively and when Fallon finished he laughed lowly.

"You bust canoe with big rock," he said. "How big?"

"As big as the ones we threw at the pool."

"Good. Canoe big bust. No can fix. You shoot Jackwoon in right arm, near shoulder. You leave him no canoe. Blandin an' Kelso an' woman come along pretty soon. Find Jackwoon. Bullet make Jackwoon sick.

Jackwoon go back to Landieu for medicine. Blandin an' Kelso go back too. No can find trail without Jackwoon. Take ten day to go back, maybe. One week Jackwoon stay at Rossville. Ten day more to get to stone house. One moon, maybe, they no get to stone house. Plenty time to find Lin Underhill."

Wattanooka was right, probably. Jackwoon wound had been severe, for it was well up into the shoulder, and it was quite likely that the heavy .45 bullet had broken a bone, had smashed it to bits. Jackwoon would realize that the wound would need better care than he could give it, and he would insist upon going back to Rossville. Blandin and Kelso would not undertake to penetrate the wilderness north of the Hayes without a guide. Therefore Fallon would have plenty of time to conduct his search for Underhill.

They were up at dawn the following morning, and shortly were moving eastward through the forest.

When they got out of the forest they came upon a great stretch of country where granite mounds rose like small, rolling hills whose crests, like swells on an ocean, reached to the horizon. Like atoms moving across the surface of a dead planet, they toiled over the desolate land all that day and the next, to come ultimately to its end and find themselves again in virgin timber.

They spoke little, for there was little to talk about. But when at the end of the third day after leaving the timber near the entrance to the valley they halted for the night and pitched their shelter, Wattanooka spoke.

"To-morrow when sun go down we see stone house," he said.

Chapter XIV

WATTANOOKA had estimated the distance accurately, for just at sundown the following day the two friends reached the edge of the forest and cautiously approached the banks of a small river where, concealed behind a dense growth of willows, they could see the house.

Fallon was curious, for he had heard much about this building, and both he and Wattanooka dropped to their knees in the willow covert and silently gave it their attention.

The house stood upon a ridge of rock, for here and there were bare, smooth spots where the naked granite was exposed. The ridge sloped gently downward to the stream at the point where Fallon and Wattanooka were concealed, but east and west the slope grew gradually sharper until it descended almost perpendicularly into the water. Directly behind the house the ridge was timbered, and it ran, broad and vast, into the northern distance. East and west of the ridge were muskeg belts; then more timber and ridges that wandered away into the horizon.

The house faced the forest, southward. It was a great, long, gloomy structure, as massive and forbidding as a medieval fortress. It lacked the parapet walls, the bastioned towers, the moats, and the drawbridges, but its huge rock walls, its planked doorways, and its timber-

barred windows suggested that its builder had had some thought of defense.

The roof was flat. And now, giving more attention to the details of the building, Fallon discovered that there were two towers, after all. They were on the rear corners, above the heavy coping of the second story, and he could see their roofs running up to peaks that were only just visible against the green background of the trees.

Despite the fact that the house was located in the wilderness, there was about it an atmosphere that was distinctly of the sea and of seafaring people. Directly in front of what appeared to be the main entrance to the house, and upon a huge granite block which stood on a broad rock level in front of the doorway, was a ship's binnacle. The instrument was made of brass and was polished until it glittered even in the dusk; while at the western corner of the house, on another rock level, was a ship's wheel, brightly painted. Also, about halfway down the slope was a small cedar pole, painted and polished, rigged with ropes and pulleys for a flag. There was no flag on it now, and Fallon suspected, from tales he had heard, that if one had been there it would have been black.

And in spite of the gloomy, forbidding atmosphere of the place there was an air of neatness about it. The great rock that formed the slope of the ridge leading down to the water of the river was as clean as the freshly scrubbed deck of a ship. There was glass in the windows of the house, and they were clear and spotless, or so they seemed from the distance at which Fallon viewed them. There was no débris of any kind visible. The little

wharf across the stream from where Fallon and Wattanooka were concealed was clean, and several canoes that were lashed to the wharf were newly painted and in good repair.

The big front door was open. It swung inward and was constructed of wood which was varnished and polished until it shone like glass. There was a small opening in its center near the top. Fallon could see bars across it but he was not certain there was glass in it because the door itself was open at an angle and the darkness of the inside of the house threw a shadow about halfway down it.

The outside door, which was swung back against the house and fastened with a great iron hook, was made of solid planking. Its massive iron hinges were visible at the butts, as was the great elbow hasp with which it was fastened when closed. The windows, too, were equipped with shutters of like material.

It was strange to find this house in the wilderness, and yet it was as primitive as its surroundings, and its ruggedness seemed somehow to be a part of the land. There was nothing in its appearance to suggest incongruity, for it was not even new, it having stood on its rocky eminence for a quarter of a century. Its ragged rock walls were dark with the continual dank atmosphere of the woods, and the chinks between the rocks were green with a rich moss.

Off to the east side of the house, at a little distance back in the timber, were the huts of an Indian village. Fallon and Wattanooka could make out dark forms moving here and there in the semi-gloom of the trees. The village was near the river—which doubled north-

ward at that point—and on the beach were a number of canoes.

In front of the house, west of the doorway, were several stout chairs, and in three of the chairs sat men. Fallon and Wattanooka were near enough to the men to distinguish their features and to hear their voices when they spoke in normal tones.

The occupant of the chair nearest the door was Randall. Fallon easily identified him because of the leather patch over his left eye, and from his stature and his brutish appearance.

The chair in which he sat was large, but he filled it. His shoulders were so broad that they projected beyond the chair's back and his arms dangled over its sides. His head was large, but its greatest circumference was at a line that would be at his eyebrows and just above his ears. Below that, in the back, was a mass of solid flesh, like gristle, which formed the back of his neck and ran around under his ears to form jaws that resembled the jowls of a hog. His chin, however, was the chin of a bulldog, and one would be at a loss as to which animal he resembled most. Perhaps one would choose the beast that one detested most.

Lumly Randall's head was almost all below his eyebrows and his ears. What little there was of it above those points was insignificant insofar as it affected his appearance. His body was big, but not fat. It appeared to be sheathed with muscle rather than excess flesh.

The man seated next to him at his right was tall, slender, and dark. His nose was long and full, making his short upper lip seem still shorter in contrast. His mouth was large and it too seemed smaller than it

actually was. The upper lip was straight, while the lower one dropped at the center with a sensual fullness. His chin was pointed and prominent and his eyes deep-set under heavy black brows. He was a well-built man, lithe and muscular, with an alertness that was physical rather than mental. Like Lumly Randall, he was an animal. But he was sleek and neat in his habits. Fallon could tell that from his mannerisms. He flecked dust from his clothing with his handkerchief; he straightened his tie a number of times; occasionally he stroked his black hair as if making certain it was lying just right; and half a dozen times while Fallon watched him he drew out a small glass and surveyed his reflection.

"Revella," whispered Wattanooka. "The man who look in glass. What he see to make him look? Maybe Wattanooka bust face off bimeby."

"The big one is Randall?"

"Umn. Fat. Like beaver. Big eat. Big drink."

The third man was thick and short. His head too was out of proportion with his body, but, except that its features were large, the face was not one to arrest a glance. The man was colorless and accustomed to taking orders, for he was continually leaning toward the other two, nodding his head, listening, not being listened to when he spoke.

"Know him?" asked Fallon.

Wattanooka shook his head negatively.

"Him, Come-along-too," he said with contempt. "Him no good. Wattanooka step on face, him get in way."

Mosquitoes must have bothered the men, for they went indoors, closing the inner door behind them. Not

long after that a light flared and the dancing beams of a kerosene lamp illuminated the windows of the room which the men had entered. The rest of the house was dark.

And now there occurred a singular thing, a thing that made Fallon rub his eyes in an effort to banish an illusion that suddenly seized him—the illusion that he was in reality looking at a medieval fortress. For from out of the darkness behind the house came two men. They wore baldrics from which were suspended broad-bladed swords, and they bore halberds with long shafts and broad, long heads. The curved axes and the heads themselves were of sharp polished steel. The men were sentries, taking their stations for the night.

Immediately they took up their duties. Starting from the southwest corner of the house, they moved along the walls. One went northward, to disappear at the northwest corner, presumably to proceed to the northeastern corner; the other strode slowly eastward and turned the southeast corner, obviously to meet his comrade. They were gone only a few minutes when they again appeared, to meet again at the point from which they had started.

The men walked with the peculiar rolling gait of seafaring men. They were short men and they looked rather ridiculous in their rigging.

Fallon asked Wattanooka if the men had been there when Wattanooka had previously visited the stone house.

“No there,” said the Indian. “Lot sailor man. No soldier.”

Lumly Randall feared something. What it was did not concern Fallon at this instant. He had come here to

enter the stone house to search for Lin Underhill, and he was merely delaying until he decided how to proceed.

And now, with darkness coming, he talked long and earnestly with Wattanooka, perfecting plans and arranging signals. Wattanooka was to stay outside. He was to watch the windows for the signals. If opportunity came during the day or night, they would meet far back in the forest at a designated place.

Wattanooka remained in the willows while Fallon slipped out of them and entered the timber. He finally emerged upon the bank of the river at a little distance from where Wattanooka was concealed. He still bore a light pack, his Colt, and his rifle.

He stepped boldly out of the timber and walked along the bank, searching for a shallow where he might cross. When he found it he leaped lightly from stone to stone, succeeding in crossing without wetting his moccasins, and made his way up the bank to the stone slope in front of the house.

One of the sentries had seen him. The man stood almost at the center of the house, watching. His halberd was grounded, he was erect and rigid.

Fallon did not hesitate. He went steadily up the slope and was moving toward the doorway when the man spoke.

"Avast there!" he said. "What do you want?"

Fallon pretended to be startled. Then he grinned at the man.

"Man, you look like a page out of a picture book!" he said. "How did you get here?"

"You'll know soon enough if you don't say what you want," growled the man. His voice had a strong cockney

accent, and his somewhat bleared blue eyes were aggressive. He had prominent teeth that would not be concealed by his lips.

"I'll say what I want to say when I see your master," returned Fallon. "Is this the way he tells you to greet his guests?"

"A guest, are you? Well, that's different. We got orders an' they must be obeyed." He lifted a hand in salute. "I'm beggin' your pardon, sir."

He stepped to the door and rapped upon it peculiarly. It was opened almost instantly by Lumly Randall who, Fallon surmised, had been close to it from the beginning of the conversation with the guard.

A pistol was in Randall's right hand, and he peered with suspicion and hostility at his visitor in the last remnants of the fading light.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly.

"Are you Lumly Randall?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm right," said Fallon. He began to unsling his pack and it dropped with a light, sodden thud to the great rock platform just outside the doorway.

Randall did not move.

"Maybe you're right and maybe you ain't," he said. "I'll say this for you—you've got plenty of gall. This is my private house. It ain't a hotel or a tavern. We don't take in any strangers. Now you can figure how right you are."

"I'm right," said Fallon. "Lumly Randall was the name. A stone house. I'm Jim Fallon."

Randall's lips curved with cold contempt and his bulldog chin began to move outward.

"You're Jim Fallon, eh?" he said. "Well, that name don't mean anything to me. I never heard it. What's more, I don't want to hear it again. So you'd best slip your anchor and drift away from here."

"Sure. No offense intended. It seems Blandin must have directed me wrong."

Fallon turned, swung his pack upward, and began to slip into the straps. He was turning away when Randall's voice halted him.

"Blandin, you say? Blandin sent you? Well, why in hell didn't you say that in the first place?"

"Blandin told me you'd be expecting me."

"He did, eh? When did he tell you that?"

"At Rossville. Two weeks ago. I'd met him at Grand Marias—where he'd told me to meet him."

Randall was peering intently at Fallon, trying to see his face in the dim light. Now he stepped back and gruffly invited Fallon inside, to see, as he said, "what you look like."

Apparently his inspection of Fallon left him still perturbed and uncertain, for in the flickering light of the oil lamp in a wall bracket Randall's good eye was still hostile and suspicious.

With his pack still on his back, Fallon stepped inside. Again he slipped out of the straps and permitted the pack to drop. Then he straightened and stretched himself as though to relax his muscles. Saying nothing, Randall stepped back a little and watched him. The pistol was still in Randall's hand.

Fallon found himself in a big room. At first glance he estimated its length at fifty feet and its width at thirty.

The room had a stone floor made of great slabs which

had been inaccurately smoothed and jointed, so that its surface was uneven. The chinks between the slabs were cemented and the entire floor was spotlessly clean. In the center were two huge stone columns that supported a massive beam ceiling. The timbers of the ceiling had been hewn and squared and varnished and polished, as were the panels between them. On the farther side of the room was a gigantic stone fireplace, with a great square breast which was recessed at about the height of a man's shoulder into a wide mantel shelf. Above the mantel shelf was an enormous moose head. The head had been prepared by a clever hand, and the great horns were polished until they glistened. On the mantel shelf was a small ship, full-rigged, with all its canvas set. It was flying a black flag which was adorned with skull and crossbones. The remaining space on the mantel was occupied by a miscellany of odds and ends. A stone tankard, a long-stemmed pipe, a sea glass, a cutlass, a clock, a pair of pistols with silver filigree work on their stocks.

In the center of the room between the two huge stone columns was a long table upon which was a gilt cloth, some small bronzes and several books. At the end of the room, eastward, was a great, brass-bound sea chest with dents in its sides and top. There were some marine pictures on the walls, and the walls themselves were painted. Several huge chairs were scattered about.

And now, standing there facing Lumly Randall, it occurred to Fallon that even if he had not been informed of the ill repute of the big stone house he would not have failed to feel its evil atmosphere. In this room there was a strange odor that paint could not dissipate, that

cleanliness could not eliminate. It was a cloying odor, musty and clinging and persistent, though slight and faint like the breath of the sea that steals inland. Fallon had encountered the odor twice in his life, and each time the blood of murdered men had caused it.

Lumly Randall was now standing with his feet spread far apart. His huge legs were like posts; he was slouched forward a little and his big chin was on his chest as he regarded Fallon searchingly with his one eye.

"Blandin sent you here, eh?" he said. "What did he tell you he wanted you to do here?"

"That is between me and Blandin."

"What's holding Blandin at Rossville?"

"Blanche."

"Blanche who?"

"Devake. She took sick. Bad. I don't know what it is. Landieu is taking care of her. It looked like she would be held up there a long time. So Blandin told me to take Jackwoon and come on. He said I might be doing some good instead of loafing there."

"What did he mean by saying you might do some good?"

"I don't know. I was to come here. I supposed you would know."

"Where's Jackwoon?"

"Jackwoon went back to Rossville. He brought me to the game trail on the Hayes directly south of here and told me to keep heading north. He thought that by the time he got back Blanche would be able to travel. He told me he would go back to bring Blandin and Blanche in."

"Who is with Blandin? Only Blanche?"

"Kelso."

"How long have you known Blandin?"

"A few years. I don't know just how many. I haven't kept track of them."

"Where did you first meet him?"

"In the Klondike."

Randall seemed to be partly satisfied. He shoved the pistol into his belt, straightened his huge body, and smiled faintly, as if with secret mirth.

"Well, that's right," he said. "Blandin was in the Klondike. Do you know what he was doing there?"

"I never was able to tell," answered Fallon. "At that time I wasn't interested in him. I was going straight then."

Randall leered at him. He seemed pleased. He laughed loudly and discordantly.

"You found it didn't pay to be good!" he roared. "Well, damme, it don't! The sanctified hypocrites never prosper. Give me a bold and clever thief or an impudent gentleman of the highway, or a free-booter with a lust for blood and a fondness for the ladies, and I'll show you a man!"

He now squinted his eye critically at Fallon and it gleamed with reluctant admiration.

"You're a bold, impudent lad yourself," he said. "If I mistake not there is a deal of strength in that big body of yours; and you've an eye that never flinches before a woman's. You've got courage or you wouldn't have looked me straight in the eyes when I opened the door upon you. For you'd been told by Blandin what sort of a man I am. Did he tell you?"

Although Fallon had no feeling except that of con-

tempt for the vulgar braggart, he smiled a straight-lipped smile and met Lumly Randall's gaze fairly.

"If I hadn't heard of you I would know from looking at the flag yonder."

Randall laughed.

"So you noticed my coat-of-arms, eh?" he said.

"Well, there's no secret about it. That baby Jolly Roger was made by a fair hand, lad; and if it wasn't for a few jelly-spined lubbers its mate would still be flying at the masthead of a ship that was once a terror of the seas! Men and fortunes change—damn them!"

Randall's solitary eye gleamed ferociously, and for an instant he stood rigid as if daring Fallon to disagree with him. But Fallon, playing the part he had chosen, maintained a sober and respectful mien.

"It's a way they have," he answered carelessly. He looked straight at Randall, adding: "I've been traveling north since dawn," he said. "I'm in a better mood for food and sleep than for talk. A word from you and I receive the hospitality of your house or I travel south again to-night."

Randall smiled crookedly, but his eye gleamed.

"Spoken like a man!" he said. "Damn me, I'll take a chance on you. It's been years since I've met a man with courage enough to be impertinent to me. The sort of slobs that I usually have around me are like Goodhull, here, and Revella, who are boot-lickers until they get drunk. Then they are only half men, but imagine themselves fighters. Ain't that so?"

He swung around and faced the men who had sat with him in the chairs outside. The two were now sitting at the big table between the two rock columns support-

ing the second story. There were glasses in front of them, and bottles.

During Fallon's presence in the room they had said nothing, but had sat there silently watching and listening.

They said nothing now. Revella's skin flushed darkly, and his black eyes flashed with murderous hate over the insult, though his gaze went immediately to the table top. The other man—Goodhull—gave no indication that he had heard.

Lumly Randall roared with derisive mirth.

"Avast!" he shouted. "Clear out of here and let me talk to a man!"

Both men rose as a unit. Goodhull moved quickly after he got to his feet, but Revella paused at the table edge, deliberately turned and faced Fallon, straightened his necktie, brushed some imaginary dust from the sleeves of his coat, and smiled suavely.

"So M'sieu Fallon has the courage to be impertinent? It is marvelous! Pleasant dreams, M'sieu Fallon."

His black eyes, flaming with hate, met Fallon's. Fallon had not exchanged words with the man, but he realized that, as sometimes happens between men, there had been aroused in Revella an instinctive hostility and antagonism, which had been provoked and perhaps aggravated by Lumly Randall's insulting reference to Revella's lack of manhood. As he watched Revella stride out of the room there was something about the man that made him think of a hidden knife, of stealthy attacks in the dark, of poison or a noose. And once again he became aware of the peculiar odor of the room—of the blood odor that the renovating power of fresh water and paint could not remove.

Chapter XV

THERE was one thing about Lumly Randall's manner that at first had rather eluded Fallon. He had not been able to determine exactly what it was until Randall had ridiculed and insulted Goodhull and Revella. It was the man's insincerity. It was in his voice, in his manner, in the gleaming of his solitary eye. It was a sardonic and hideous insincerity, a ribald inward and hidden passion for double-dealing. The man would pretend friendliness and all the time he would be plotting destruction. It was duplicity of the sort that would permit him to smile with engaging joviality at a man who at his orders was being forced to walk the plank. It was the insincerity of the man who reaches out a hand to lead you into the pit.

And now, having plumbed Lumly Randall's character, Fallon knew that Randall was plotting his destruction. He knew that Randall had not believed his story that he was a friend of Blandin's. He had pretended that he was being convinced, but he was too wily a rogue to accept, unsupported, any man's word. It might be that he half believed Fallon, and had granted him the hospitality of the stone house until he could really convince himself that his guest was speaking the truth, but now as Fallon faced him after the disappearance of Goodhull and Revella he was aware

of the gargantuan mirth lurking behind the eye that stared steadily at him.

He told Fallon to kick his pack into a corner and invited him to stand his rifle near it. He looked at the heavy Colt in the leather sheath at Fallon's side, and his lips curved into a smile.

"A good gun, my lad," he said. "Aye, and I have no doubt you know how to use it. What caliber is it?"

"Forty-five."

"Hefty, I'll warrant. Let me feel its weight."

He held out a hand. But Fallon made no motion to grant the request.

"Its weight is forty ounces, loaded," he answered.

Randall did not appear to be offended by Fallon's tacit refusal to permit him to handle the gun. Instead, he smiled.

"It is loaded now?"

Fallon nodded.

"I might say that it is an offense against hospitality to bring a loaded gun into your host's house," Randall said. "But you have come in from a long trail and we will let the offense pass," he added.

He seated himself in one of the chairs at the far side of the table. He was facing the big fireplace and Fallon, who had moved around the room until he was now standing with his back to the fireplace.

Fallon was facing Randall, but from where he stood he could see an open doorway at his left and another at his right. These doors opened into the darkened interiors of rooms that adjoined the big room in which he was standing. There was no light in either of them. If he were to extend his arms straight outward from his

sides, the left would point directly into the doorway leading into the room on the east and his right would point into the room on the west. They were directly in line with his body.

Fallon did not look straight at the doors of the rooms, but merely glanced at them out of the corners of his eyes. Yet it seemed to him that Randall had taken note of the glances and that the solitary eye glinted derisively.

But Randall's voice was friendly.

"You will dine presently, Fallon," he said. "But first you will answer a few more questions. You see, it was not understood that Blandin was to send me a guest, and I want to inquire more closely into the circumstances that sent you here. There is no hurry, unless you are very hungry. In the meantime here is some very excellent burgundy." He pushed bottle and glass toward Fallon.

Fallon walked the distance to the table, a full fifteen feet, and filled a glass with the dark purple wine. While Fallon filled the glass Randall did not move, but sat leaning back in his chair, his hands braced against the edge of the table, watching his guest's face. The glass filled, Fallon looked at Randall, smiled, stepped back a little so that he could see Randall while he drank, and slowly drained the glass. Then he stepped forward again, set the glass on the table, and moved slowly backward until he was again standing close to the big fireplace.

Fallon had been very deliberate in his drinking, and all the while Randall had not moved. His good eye was as steady as an agate and quite as hard. His nose, which

was hooked at the bridge like an eagle's beak, was abnormally prominent in the dim light from the single oil lamp, and the leather patch over his blind eye accentuated the villainous cast of his face. His lips were in an odd pout; it seemed they were pursed to assist him in the process of thinking, for they moved into various crooked angles and curves as he continued to watch Fallon, revealing the passions that stirred him.

That he was mentally debating some sort of evil Fallon was certain. He had not yet reached a decision, and in attempting to do so he was considering the situation carefully.

There was Fallon's gun to be thought of. Forty ounces, it weighed—loaded. Perhaps he was considering the slight emphasis Fallon had placed on the "loaded." Perhaps he was wondering about how quickly Fallon could draw the gun, and how well he could shoot it after once it emerged from the holster. He might also be considering other things. He might be wondering how strong Fallon was, how quickly he could move.

Something was being pondered in the brain behind his swinish face, beneath the low, receding forehead—urge and doubt, lust and cunning and caution were being weighed against the possibility of failure.

At last the hideous lips curved into a smirk, and once again Fallon got the feeling that great and hideous mirth had gripped the man. But Fallon was never more cool than now, never more alert and prepared.

"Damme, you're a man, Fallon!" said Randall. He took his hands from the table edge and folded them over his great chest. Above the edge of the table Fallon could see the butt of the pistol in his belt. The right

hand was poised directly above it. A single movement would draw it, if that was Randall's intention.

"You're a man, Fallon!" he repeated. And once more Fallon could detect reluctant admiration in his eye. "You are as strong as a bull moose. I'll warrant those muscles of yours could twist a man's head off. All day you've been on a hard trail—none harder—and yet you stand there, balancing yourself on your toes like a runner. I'd like to have had you with me in the old days.

"That's a replica of the ship I sailed, Fallon. A beauty, eh? She could out-sail anything on the Seven Seas. Aye, and out-run them, too, when it happened she had to. Look at the lines of her, man. Did you ever see anything like her?"

Fallon turned his head for the split part of a second; turned it back again as quickly, and slipped his lithe body sideways as he caught the glint of the long-bladed knife that had already left Lumly Randall's right hand and was flashing toward him like a steak of light, straight for his throat.

As Fallon moved sideways he was also moving forward. In two leaps he had covered the space between the mantel and Randall, and as he heard the knife ring against the stone breast of the fireplace his heavy Colt was in his right hand. He saw Randall clawing at the pistol in his belt. In his astonishment over the failure of the knife to find its target and his eagerness to kill, his hand had faltered.

Before he could draw the pistol Fallon's body, coming feet first over the table, was upon him. Fallon's feet struck his chest, and Randall crashed backward,

the chair under him. The back of his head struck the stone floor with a sound like that which would be made by a coconut shell cracking. His face turned instantly ashen and his huge body grew limp.

Standing over him, gun in hand, Fallon looked down at him. A thin trickle of red appeared under Randall's head and spread slowly over the surface of the stone upon which he rested. The impact of Fallon's body striking Randall had been terrific, but there had been little sound. The ring of the knife against the stone chimney, the sodden crack of Randall's skull cracking on the stone floor, the crash of the wooden chair, muffled by Randall's weight, had been all.

Fallon stood erect and sheathed his gun. His gaze roved around the room. It went to the two doors—one east, one west; to the fireplace. He saw the knife. It was a heavy weapon, weighing, he judged, three or four pounds. The blade was fifteen or sixteen inches long, the haft was short. A good knife to throw, and Randall had thrown it well. The knife had not fallen to the floor. It was lying on the mantel, its razorlike edge gleaming in the light from the bracket lamp.

Randall was unconscious. He would probably die. At least there was little probability of his recovering consciousness for some time. And so, leaving Randall where he had fallen, Fallon walked to the front wall and took the bracket lamp down. He lowered the wick a little so that the blaze would not smudge the chimney when he walked, then returned to the mantel and picked up the knife Randall had thrown.

A terrible weapon. He examined it, the lamp in one hand, the knife in the other. For an instant as he looked

at the blade's keen edge he considered how closely he had escaped death. Had he been a fractional part of a second later in turning, the knife, flung with terrific force, would have been buried to the haft in his throat. If he had not been suspicious of treachery he would now be lying where he was standing, and Randall, smirking triumphantly, would be looking down at him.

He looked from the knife to Randall. Randall's huge body was motionless; he had not moved after the fall. His big chin, now more than ever like a bulldog's, was thrust straight upward toward the ceiling. Fallon was in no hurry to help him. He had now an opportunity to explore the house in an effort to find Lin Underhill, and he meant to do it. That was why he had taken the lamp from the bracket.

He looked at the doorway that opened upon the darkened room eastward. It was the door that Revella and Goodhull had used. He would enter that door later. He turned to the west door and abruptly halted. He stood, his muscles rigid, while he stared at a vision of loveliness that he was never to forget.

Far into the darkness beyond the west door, so far that it seemed to be hundreds of feet distant, appeared the head and shoulders of a woman. She was holding a small lamp in one hand, so that the blaze was just above her head, and the light shone down upon her, framing her head and shoulders in its subdued radiance. Her hair, black and lustrous, was in a filmy cascade as if she had been interrupted while combing it. Through it appeared the perfect oval of her face, the skin like white marble, and her full, firm throat sweeping down in ravishingly graceful curves to a white bosom where a

light night garment was caught tightly in her left hand. She was leaning a little forward, listening and watching, and her eyes, wide with fright, with long, velvety lashes that were visible to Fallon, were gazing at him with a strange mixture of fear and astonishment and wonder.

Fallon drew a breath so deep that he feared his lungs would burst. Some unsuspected emotion was tugging at him, a latent force which had never before permitted its presence to be known was stirring him. The blood in his body seemed to drain until his cheeks were chalk white. Then it returned, surging and leaping in his veins like fire, filling him with a strange ecstasy, awakening in him a desire that he had never known.

He must have been a fearsome figure to the woman as he stood in front of the fireplace, the oil lamp in his left hand, its light shining upon him, the long-bladed knife in his right hand. He must have been a vision to conjure thoughts of murder in the woman's mind. She must have heard Randall's chair overturn, or perhaps she had heard the knife ring against the stone wall of the chimney breast. Something had brought her with the light to investigate and now fright was holding her in the spot where she had stood when she had caught sight of Fallon. For now, watching her, Fallon observed that she drew her breath with a gasp, and that the lamp swayed in her hand as if about to fall. For an instant the chimney toppled. But presently it steadied. The woman stood motionless for a time, intently watching Fallon. And then, after a little while, seeming to overcome her fright, she straightened proudly and began to walk forward toward him.

Chapter XVI

OBSERVING that the woman had courageously decided to investigate, Fallon placed the bracket lamp upon the mantel shelf and laid the knife beside it. In this manner he assured her that whatever had happened previous to her appearance, she herself was to be immune to harm. However, his real purpose was to encourage her to come nearer so that he might speak to her. For a time, watching her in the far-off darkness, he had entertained a fear that she might not be real.

She was real enough, though. He was convinced of that when at last she stood in the open doorway within twenty or thirty feet of him, looking at him.

The marble-white pallor of her face was now tinged with color. A blush suffused her. It ran quickly up her throat and spread over her face, adding a vital radiance to her appearance. Her eyelashes drooped, and there was a queer, defiant shyness in her eyes, which were very clear and very determined. It was plain that she intended to discover what had happened and that no consideration of modesty or embarrassment would deter her.

For the first time in his life Fallon was embarrassed before a woman. Mrs. Hammond had told him that when he wanted a woman he would take her. He had

always known that. He had never yet wanted one. Until now. And now that she was standing before him he knew that he could not and would not take her after the manner he had always confidently expected he would—with a ruthlessness and impetuosity that would sweep her off her feet and into his arms.

No. A swift and startling change had come over him. Respect, reverence, gentleness were the emotions that now gripped him. His steady eyes, that had never wavered under a woman's glance, were still bold, yet there was a softness in them, a flame, that betrayed him. He could feel his cheeks burning; he was aware that his breath was coming fast, and yet he had no power to control it.

He said nothing. The woman continued to watch him. Her gaze roved over him from head to foot, quickly, and returned immediately to his face, which she studied searchingly, as if in an effort to determine what sort of a man he was, if she had anything to fear from him, whether if she had she should cry out for help or endeavor to deal with him herself. It appeared she decided to follow the latter course; and perhaps she observed Fallon's embarrassment and was influenced by it, for the wonderful eyes grew slightly amused and her lips curved into a faint smile.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I am a guest."

Fallon knew that her voice would be like that—low, carefully modulated, calm. It matched her dark beauty.

Her lashes drooped before Fallon's gaze—now grown bolder—but lifted again. Her fright had vanished, and she was now confident and serene. She appeared to be

unconscious of the garment she wore—or rather she wore it as she might have worn more pretentious apparel, with the simple dignity and grace that identifies those who are accustomed to such things.

“A guest, monsieur?”

Fallon observed her eyes grow cold. They seemed to gleam with a slight contempt.

“Your pardon, monsieur. I did not mean to intrude upon the amusements of one of Lumly Randall’s guests. Nor did I deliberately attempt to spy upon your somewhat amazing actions. I thought I heard an odd noise and I came to investigate. Do you always roam around at night carrying a lamp and a knife, monsieur?”

The mockery in her voice steadied Fallon. At a stroke it sobered him.

He smiled and bowed, adding: “I have some bad habits, ma’am. One of them is that whenever a knife is thrown at me I invariably dodge.”

“A commendable action, I believe.” She seemed not to take him seriously, for her smile was mocking, though she was certainly admiring his muscular body, his bold eyes, and his handsome face. And she was thoughtfully considering his words, trying to understand his meaning, for plainly she had not yet observed Lumly Randall lying on the floor with the overturned chair under him and his blood creeping over the stone.

She looked at the knife on the mantel shelf.

“Is that the knife?” she asked.

Fallon nodded.

“It was nothing amazing, ma’am,” he said. “Knives have been thrown before, and will be thrown again. Passion will always be passion.”

She was still looking at the knife, and now she drew a sharp breath and grew rigid.

"Is that Lumly Randall's knife?" she asked. "It looks very like it."

"It is Lumly Randall's knife."

"And he threw it at you?"

Fallon nodded.

Her eyes widened; apprehension filled them.

"Where is Lumly Randall?" she whispered.

Fallon pointed, watching her.

She gasped, drew her night robe tighter. Her cheeks blanched. For an instant she closed her eyes, swayed. Then, hesitatingly, she moved to where Randall was lying and stood, with both hands pressed to her bosom, gazing down at him. She shivered when she observed the blood on the slab of stone under Randall's head.

"Dead?" she whispered. "Did you kill him?"

"He fell," said Fallon. "He is not dead. He may not die."

"He must not die!" she declared.

She stood erect, facing Fallon. Some strong passion gripped her. It was not regret, or grief, or any of the allied emotions that assail one who contemplates the passing of a dear friend or relative; and Fallon knew that the bestial Randall could not be loved by her. He decided that Randall was not even a relative, and that her eagerness to have the man live was based upon some obscure reason that she would keep to herself.

"There is no doctor here, of course?" said Fallon.

"Yes. Meeson. He is an old man. He belonged to

Lumly Randall's old crew—to his ship, the *Terror*. Ugh! I hate him. And yet we must keep Lumly Randall from dying. We *must!*”

“We'll do what we can. Is Meeson in this house?”

“Yes. He has a room in the west wing—under the tower. Will you go for him while I summon Revella and Goodhull and the others to carry Randall to his room? Take a lamp and go through that door.” She pointed to the door through which she had entered the room. “At the far end of the room you will find a hallway,” she continued. “To your right. At the end of the hallway are some stairs. They will lead you to another hallway, upstairs. At the end of that hallway you will come to a door. Knock upon it four times—twice softly and twice loudly. Meeson will answer—if he isn't too drunk. Tell him what has happened. Tell him I want him to come immediately. Hurry, please!”

Fallon looked back as he reached the west door. The woman was advancing toward the east door. She was hurrying, and had drawn her night robe tightly to her so that it would not impede her progress. He saw her white heels twinkling above the sandals she wore.

Fallon did not share her eagerness. Randall was nothing to him, and the man had tried to kill him. He would feel no grief over Randall's death. He was more interested in what he might find on the second floor of the house—in the tower itself, if perchance he could find an entrance to it. Also, he would be interested in the rooms he passed, for one of them might conceal Lin Underhill.

He took his time going through the next room. It

was not as large as the other, and there was no supporting stone pillar in it. But it had a stone floor, and the light of his lamp revealed its furnishings. It was obviously a lounging room, for there were big chairs here and there, two great lounges, some bearskins on the stone slabs that formed the floor, and several heavy tables—card tables. There was also some gambling paraphernalia.

Fallon was little interested in the furnishings. There were four large windows equipped with glass and heavy wooden bars, but the shutters had not yet been closed and Fallon moved to one of the windows and stood before it for an instant, holding the light so that its beams shone fairly upon him. He knew that Wattanooka would be watching, and this was one of the signals that had been agreed upon before Fallon entered the house. The signal indicated that Fallon was having no trouble.

Leaving the window, he made his way through the room. There was a door, and through it began the hall the woman had spoken of. There was also another door, at his left, and he decided it opened into a room in line with the other two that he had already been in. Obeying the woman's instructions, he strode down the hall, which ran to his right, but he moved slowly, inspecting several doors he passed and carefully trying their fastenings, to determine whether they could be opened. All were closed, locked. At each door he listened, after having tried the fastenings, but there came no sound to indicate that anyone inside the rooms had heard him.

He reached the stairs, slowly climbed them, and found himself in the upper hall. The woman had told him that at the end of the hallway he would find a door,

but he found there were half a dozen doors opening from the hallway, and also one at each end.

He tried the east door first, and there was no response to his knock. As he stood before the door, listening, he heard sounds that seemed to come from a distance: a noise as of boots on a wooden floor; footsteps on stairs; voices raised in alarm. He heard them only faintly and was convinced that they came through the wall at the end of the hall. If that were the case, then the stone wall at the end of the hall must divide the house, and there must be rooms on the other side. Revella and Goodhull had entered the door that opened from the east end of the big room downstairs, and in order to reach their sleeping quarters they would have to use a stairway. And so far as Fallon could see the stairway he had used was the only one, unless, as he suspected, there were two sections to the house, the sections divided by the stone wall, and each section having its own stairway.

He went to the other end of the hallway, trying all the doors as he passed them. There was no response to his knocking, and he finally reached the last door. He decided that this was the northwest corner of the house and that one of the towers was directly above the room before whose door he stood. There was no stairway leading upward. There might be one outside the house, but that was improbable.

He knocked on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again, and this time a gruff voice replied:

"Who's there?"

"Are you Meeson?" asked Fallon.

"Yes. Damn you, whoever you are! Let a man sleep, can't you?"

"You're wanted in the big room downstairs," Fallon informed him. "Randall's been hurt. Skull's crushed."

"It's time the big slob got it crushed," growled Meeson. "I've been on the point of crushing it myself a dozen times. All right; I'll be down. Who's that—Killen? Mortwell? Atkins? Eccles?"

Fallon did not answer. He retreated to the east end of the hall and flattened himself in one of the doorways, behind the wide, heavy jambs. He blew out the lamp, first making certain he had matches with which to light it again, and stood waiting, for he had resolved to enter Meeson's room if possible, hoping it would lead him into the tower.

Meeson was taking his time. Apparently he liked Lumly Randall but little, if at all.

There were now no sounds from the lower floor. There was no sound from Meeson's room. The atmosphere in the hallway was heavy and musty, as if no air from the outside had ever reached it. The stone floor of the hall was damp, the walls were clammy with moisture. The silence was tomblike.

But presently Fallon heard a door creak on its hinges and a beam of light appeared on the wall opposite Meeson's door. Meeson's shadow appeared on the wall—a short, fat man.

He came out into the hall carrying a lamp. He locked the door with a huge key and put the key into a pocket. The light from the lamp shone on his face as he walked down the hall toward the stairs. Meeson had a heavy, dissolute face. His hair was gray, sparse, tousled. He was grinning, talking to himself.

"His skull's cracked, eh?" he said. "He must have

landed on the top of his head. Hm. The old skull-cracker finally got his own cracked, eh? Heh, heh, heh!"

He went down the stairs, the light dancing after him; and Fallon moved down the hall toward the room he had just vacated.

Chapter XVII

EVEN Fallon's great strength was not sufficient to break the lock of Meeson's door, so after a while he ceased his efforts and stood in the hallway, panting from his determined attacks.

The hallway was dark, for Fallon had not relighted his lamp, and there were no windows to let in light from the outside. Temporarily baffled, Fallon waited in the darkness, thinking of his adventures of the night.

He had accomplished something already. In cracking Randall's skull he had disposed of the one man who might have denied him the privilege of staying in the house. Randall had not believed his story, of course, or he would not have thrown the knife. If Randall lived it would be many days before he would be able to remember what had happened to him, and by that time Fallon hoped to find Underhill. In the meantime the other members of the household would be forced to consider him Randall's guest, for both Revella and Goodhull had been in the big room downstairs when Randall had accepted him.

But now, although he was as eager as ever to fulfill his mission, he was aware of an added interest in life. He had been a soldier of fortune, an adventurer who had indifferently viewed the love affairs of other men, while his own had been the temporary and transient contacts that pass quickly and are soon forgotten. In Wyoming

there had been a girl who had aroused his interest, but he had one day observed her glancing flirtatiously at another man, and his interest in her had died as quickly as it had been born. There had been other girls who had arrested his attention. But not for long. Not one of them had appealed to his imagination. Not one had been of the type of which he had dreamed—the steady, serious, serene, and mature woman who would take her place by his side, prepared to meet what might come. He had been patient, knowing that there were such women in the world. And now he had met one.

Like all the great adventures of life, this one had burst upon him unexpectedly. He had not been prepared for it, and so when he had faced her in the big room the passion that seethed in him had bewildered him. In this sinister house in the center of a vast wilderness, among thieves and cutthroats, she had appeared to him in the darkness. He never doubted her. She was like a flawless pearl among swine. Her beauty had not been marred; her sturdy, uncompromising honesty shone out of her wonderful eyes. He did not know how she happened to be living in the stone house, surrounded by men like Lumly Randall and the others. Nor did he care.

He relighted the lamp and strode down the hall, retracing his steps to the big room. He had not succeeded in getting into Meeson's room, but he intended to have another try before the night was over.

When he reached the big room there was no one in it but the woman, and she was sitting in a big chair before the fireplace. She did not seem to be aware of Fallon's presence, but she sat gazing straight before her, at the miniature ship on the mantel shelf.

The lamp that she had carried was on the long table over which Fallon had leaped to throw himself feet first at Randall. Her face was in shadow and Fallon could not observe its expression. He was reluctant to disturb her, and so he stood at one end of the table, crossed his arms over his chest, and with one hand supporting his chin, waited for her to rouse herself from her reverie.

While Fallon had been away from the big room the woman had arranged her hair in bulging coils and waves. The nape of her neck was exposed to him, and its beauty sent a nameless pang through him. His lungs swelled, and a sigh escaped him.

"I heard you come in," she said. She did not turn her head. "Why do you sigh like that?"

"I never sigh, madam."

"You sighed only just now, monsieur."

"I was not aware of it."

"It is nothing, monsieur. One sighs over memories, over trifles, because of ennui, because of something denied or desired, or because of pique, or because one is in love. A woman may sigh over many things, monsieur, but when a man sighs he is in love."

Fallon did not answer. If he had dared to answer he would have told her that he was in love with her.

"What is your name, monsieur?"

"Jim Fallon."

"Jim Fallon," she repeated. "That is an Irish name, is it not? Mine is Denise Laville. It is French—so I am told. There—we are acquainted. And I do not fear you as much as when I first saw you—with the knife in your hand." She nodded her head toward the east door of the

room. "Meeson and the others have taken him to his room," she added. "He is hurt very badly."

She turned in the chair now and looked at Fallon. She was now facing the lamp and Fallon saw that her eyes were a chestnut brown. They were narrowed with interest.

"You are Lumly Randall's guest, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"You came here to-night?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come here?"

"Blandin sent me."

Her lips tightened. Her eyes flashed once, then they were serene again.

"Blandin and Lumly Randall are friends," she said. "If Blandin sent you here, why did Lumly Randall try to kill you?"

"I cannot answer that."

"I can," she said. "Blandin did not send you. Randall suspected you of being an impostor, and you are."

Fallon did not answer. Yet her frankness amazed him, brought a slow smile to his lips. Denise Laville was a very disconcerting young woman. She was not, he decided, more than twenty-two or -three years old, at the age when most women have not yet cast off the frivolous mannerisms of adolescence, and yet the gravity of her expression, the steady serenity of her gaze, were in his experience associated with women of a more mature age. He could not hope to deceive her. He knew there was little hope of successfully lying to her.

"You are an impostor, aren't you?"

"If you mean that Blandin did not send me here—yes."

"I knew it."

"I should like to know how you happened to read my thoughts."

"Not your thoughts, monsieur. Your face. It was not a miracle. It was when I entered the room and saw you standing at the mantel holding the lamp and the knife. You blushed, monsieur. A blush such as I have never seen before. And I knew you were not wicked. Wicked men do not blush when alone with women. Ah, I have seen them. And a minute ago, when you told me that Blandin had sent you, I knew you were lying. You see, monsieur, I have met many wicked men since I have lived in this house. Only once was there a good man, and he did not stay long. Like you, monsieur, he blushed when we were brought together. After he disappeared—very suddenly—I overheard Lumly Randall telling another man that my man who had blushed had been 'Too damned good to have around.' Those were Lumly Randall's words."

She was still facing him, studying him. Her eyes were pools of conjecture and interest. There was wistfulness in them also, and the dawning of a fugitive hope.

"Ah, monsieur, if I only dared to think so!" she said, her voice almost a whisper.

"If you only dared to think what?"

"That you have come—that you are here to search for Lin Underhill!"

Fallon's muscles stiffened; a pulse of contempt ran over him. His lips tightened. Was this woman a Delilah, sent to tempt him? Were there men concealed in the

darkened rooms waiting to pounce upon him if he confessed his real errand?

He smiled at her. Already he had confessed that he had not been sent by Blandin. The spell of her was upon him. Cynically he had watched other men yield to the lure and witchery of a beautiful face, realizing they were merely victims of their passions, sacrificing their manhood for a few hours of pleasure. And he had told himself that never would he be so tempted. But until now he had never known passion—such passion as this woman had inspired.

He had already committed himself. If she had fooled him so far he was trapped, and he would meet his death in this house. He laughed lowly, grimly jesting.

"I came to search for Underhill," he said.

He stepped back so that he could see both the east and west doors, and his right hand hovered over the butt of the heavy revolver at his right hip.

Nothing happened. There were no sounds except those that were being made by the scraping of boots on the stone floor above, and he had heard these sounds ever since he had entered the room. They indicated to him that Lumly Randall's friends were working over him, probably under Meeson's orders.

And now there came another sound. Denise Laville was crying.

Amazed, Fallon stood watching her.

He was about to move toward her when he heard a slow step on a distant stairway. It seemed to come through the east door. A step descending.

Fallon observed that Denise had also heard it, for she sat erect in the chair, quickly dried her eyes with a

handkerchief, and placed an admonishing finger to her lips. And while the step was still on the stairs she got up and stood with her back to the fireplace. She was facing Fallon again. Her eyes were glistening; they were still moist from the tears she had shed. She had really been moved to some great emotion by his words. And he had doubted. The admonitory finger satisfied him that his suspicions had been unjust. He smiled at her as both stood listening to the descending footsteps, and his heart leaped with a great joy when she returned the smile.

The steps came on. They echoed hollowly in the darkness beyond the east door, and they were accompanied by a metallic clanking as of a sword sheath striking a man's boot. The latter sound was new, and Fallon concluded that on the stairs the sheath had been lifted. Therefore the wearer must now be on the level floor of the room eastward and the sheath was dangling from its straps.

Out of Denise's smile came the words: "Denatti—the exquisite."

The gay mockery in her voice was contradicted by the pallor which swept over her face. She feared Denatti—whoever he was.

She crossed the room and as she passed Fallon she whispered: "Do not tell Denatti what you have told me." She paused at the front door—which was closed—and peered, or pretended to peer, outward into the night; and at the instant the newcomer strode into the east door she was again crossing to the mantel, giving the man the impression that while she was in the room with Fallon she had not been engaged in conversation with him.

Denatti hesitated slightly as he reached the door. He darted quick glances at Fallon and Denise, and around the room. Then he strode forward, to halt within half a dozen paces of Fallon to stare at him impudently.

He was arrayed in black velvet, knee-length trousers, black velvet coat which was rakishly cut at the waist so that it flared slightly outward, a white ruffled shirt, a broad scarlet sash, a ruffled collar, and a flowing tie. The sleeves of his coat were wide and loose at the cuffs, revealing a trace of white linen. He was hatless, and he wore glistening boots with low, soft tops. His fingertips touched the tops of the boots as he bowed to Denise.

He was a handsome rogue. And rogue he was, from his glossy black hair to the toes of the spotless boots. His skin was a light olive, made lighter by face powder; his eyes were black, flashing, arrogant. They burned with the light of bold desire as they rested on Denise, who held her head high and gave him back a straight, disdainful stare; they flamed with cold hate when they met Fallon's, though Fallon's gaze was expressionless.

A fop; a dandy, was Denatti. A swashbuckling, imitation gentleman of a past age; the mate of a privateer; a gallant with the ladies of a Latin court. Denatti could be any of these, but it was highly probable that he was a son of a decadent line, because in spite of his well-cut features there was in his face evidence of a brutal and dissolute nature which had not been acquired but had been bequeathed him by his progenitors.

His gaze returned to Denise; he ignored Fallon.

"Mademoiselle Denise is ravishing to-night," he said, his voice low and soft and filled with a boldness

which told her that he had taken note of the night garment she wore.

Denise's head went a little higher.

"Monsieur Denatti is always the insincere flatterer," she answered. Her disdain of Denatti was so apparent that it brought a twitching smile to Fallon's lips. It was evident that Denise had not exaggerated her ability to detect the difference between good men and wicked men, and it was equally evident that Denatti had made no sort of progress with her—if his idea of progress was a conquest.

"It is discouraging," said Denatti. "But if Made-moiselle Denise will not accept my admiration perhaps she will be good enough to present her friend." He stood, his left hand on his sword hilt, insolently staring at Fallon.

Was it jealousy that now assailed Fallon?—that sent fire, instead of blood, surging through his veins? Had it been Denatti's glance at Denise's night garment that roused in him the murderous rage that flamed in his eyes?

Slowly, deliberately, he turned his back to Denatti and walked to the front door, where he stood shading his eyes with his hands to gaze out.

This house! It was peopled with cutthroats that masqueraded in grotesque and preposterous raiment. They were ghosts of yesterday treading to-day's stage, making their appearance from various dark corners, clanging down stairways with swords dangling at their sides. Cockney sailors posing as halberdiers; a fat doctor croaking about broken skulls; pirate ship on the mantel bearing the black flag with its skull and crossbones; Revella,

a fop with murderous instincts posing as a gentleman; Lumly Randall himself with his owlish secrecy and his loud boasts of conquests; the room with its odor of blood; Denatti and his insolent staring.

Denatti crossed the room behind Fallon, his right hand gripping the hilt of his sword. He stood behind Fallon and gently tapped Fallon's shoulder.

"Insolent lout!" he said. "Stand clear that I may spit you!"

His sword was half drawn when Fallon's hands closed over it. A prodigious wrench and the sword snapped off at the hilt. The blade clanked back into the scabbard and the handle, equipped with a silver basket guard, clattered to the floor. One of Fallon's hands went out and gripped Denatti's throat. A squeeze, and Denatti's head rolled. A vigorous shove, and Denatti reeled, staggered backward, and brought up against one of the stone columns, his mouth open, gasping for breath.

And then, as Fallon moved after him, wary, his muscles alive with eagerness, his lips tight, and his eyes alight with the sudden passion that Denatti had aroused, Denatti sought to draw a pistol from his waist, beneath the sash.

It was then that Denise heard, the first time in her life, the sodden thud of a fist striking flesh. She saw the blow struck, heard it land, and watched Denatti strike the floor, face down, to lie there, unconscious.

And then, in a frenzy of fear, she was pulling at Fallon's arm, trying to drag him out of the room

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"No. He'll be a little dizzy for a while, but he'll get over that, too."

"Then come!" she whispered. "Let us get out of here before Denatti recovers. You are a brave, strong man, but you cannot fight all of them. Come, please?"

Fallon nodded.

Denise went to the table, took up the lamp she had placed there when she had first entered the room, and walked swiftly into the darkness beyond the west door. Fallon followed.

She made her way up the stairs that Fallon had climbed in searching for Meeson's room, and with Fallon standing close to her she took a huge key from a case which was suspended from a girdle around her waist, unlocked a door, entered, and motioned Fallon to follow. Then she closed the door, locked it from the inside, and stood there for an instant with the light shining upon her wondrous face, panting and listening.

"Oh!" she said. "I was afraid they were coming!"

But no sound came from below.

There were three windows in this room which, Fallon instantly divined, was Denise's. The windows were open, and from the dense timber around the house came the night noises of the denizens of the wild. Also, as Fallon and Denise stood there listening, they heard the faint footsteps of the halberdiers as they strode back and forth on the granite slope outside.

Chapter XVIII

DENISE'S room, unlike the hallways and other rooms that Fallon had seen, was cheerful. He was aware of light, delicate curtains, of decorations and ornaments that were distinctly feminine, of a bed with a gay counterpane and pillow slips, of tassels and pictures and plaques and statuettes, of laces and ribbons and silken garments; but he was aware of them only as a setting for the woman who now stood before him, shrinking a little from him, trembling a little, trying to smile at him, trying to convey to him the message that she had brought him here merely to provide sanctuary.

She waved him to a chair and sat in one near him, breathlessly watching him, wondering, perhaps, if she had been wise in bringing him here.

"It is the first time, monsieur," she said, blushing.

"The first time for what?"

"The first time there has been—the first time I have ever——" She hesitated, confused, and finished resolutely: "The first time a man has ever entered my room."

"I know it," answered Fallon bluntly. He frowned. "But Denatti would need no second invitation. Most men are wolves."

She smiled serenely. Her color had become normal.

"Men like Denatti aren't so bad," she said, shrugging her shoulders a little. "They rely upon their good looks,

thinking that women will fall into their arms. If one falls they attribute it to their attractions. When they do not succeed they feel they are not appreciated. Denatti is a peacock. I am not afraid of men like Denatti. A look, a disdainful glance, will silence him. It is men like Blandin that I fear. I met Blandin twice. The first time he leered at me; the second time he tried to crowd me into a dark hallway."

Fallon clenched his hands. His lips went into straight lines.

"I mean to kill Blandin," he declared.

"I have seen so much of that. I have not actually witnessed it, of course," she added. "But I know it has been done."

Fallon thought of the odor in the big room downstairs.

"How long have you lived here?"

"I am twenty-three. They tell me that I was about three when I was brought here, and so I have been here about twenty years."

"Is Randall any relation to you?"

"No. My father was first mate on Lumly Randall's ship, the *Terror*, a pirate ship. My mother was on a ship that was captured by the *Terror*. They murdered all the men of the captured ship, and they drew lots for my mother. My father won her. She was not molested by any of the other men. Lumly Randall and my father were great friends. I do not know what happened to the *Terror*. My first recollection of anything is that Lumly Randall, my mother, and some other men were in an open boat, at sea. Afterward everything is vague. There was a city, fine clothes, luxuries. And I

have a mental picture of my mother. And yet the picture is mostly great sad dark eyes and a pallor. I think my mother grieved for my father. There was never another man. I do not know what happened, but one day Mother and I and Lumly Randall were in this house. I have been here ever since. My mother died. She is buried near here.

"Lumly Randall always treated me as a lady. He told me I was a lady, and that some day he would tell me the story of my mother's name before it was changed to Laville. Lumly Randall is a beast and a murderer, but he treated me well."

She paused, listened. Fallon could hear someone walking in the hallway. The steps paused at the door and a hand shook the fastenings.

"Mademoiselle Laville!" came a voice.

"Yes?"

"Open the door!"

Revella's voice!

"I am undressing, monsieur!"

She blushed as she lied, but glanced at Fallon and gave her head a little toss of defiance. She was natural, Fallon decided. In her was no pretense of ignorance of men's desires. Her protection during her stay at the stone house had not been the stupidity of innocence, nor the assumed hard sophistication of experience. She knew men and women, but chose to ignore what was base in them.

Revella laughed.

"Then Fallon is not in there with you?"

"Monsieur!"

She would have made a good actress. There was good

counterfeit of indignation in her voice. She was brave clever, wise.

Revella laughed again.

"Well, he is a handsome fellow, that clodhopper. A bit too heavy about the shoulders, perhaps; and a trifle crude, too, for the discriminating. And yet who knows what preferences a woman may have?"

Denise did not answer.

"And so he is not with you?" he said. "Well, you saw him smash Denatti's face in, didn't you? Denatti says you were there."

"Yes. I was there. Denatti drew his sword. Monsieur Fallon only defended himself. But I ran, Revella. I was afraid of Monsieur Fallon."

"You were very discreet, mademoiselle. The man is a terrible fighter. He almost killed Randall. Meeson found prints of Fallon's moccasins on Randall's chest. He doubts that Randall will live. If Fallon is in the house we shall kill him. Be on your guard. Pleasant dreams."

They heard Revella's footsteps going down the hall and the stairs. And when there was silence again Denise whispered, and looked at Fallon with eyes that had suddenly become severe and accusing.

"Monsieur, you have lied to me," she said. "You told me Lumly Randall had fallen."

"He threw the knife. I leaped across the table at him and landed with my feet against his chest."

She shook her head and her color receded a little.

"And in doing that you spoiled all chance of ever finding Lin Underhill," she said. "For Randall alone knows where Underhill is hidden. And perhaps he will never be able to tell."

"Was Underhill in the house?"

"He was. For many months he was a prisoner in the east tower. But only a few weeks ago I overheard Randall telling Denatti that he had taken him away from there and that he was now hidden in a place that no one could find. A secret place, it must have been, for Randall and Denatti almost quarreled about it. Denatti told Randall he had as much right to know as Randall himself. But Randall did not tell. He said he meant to get the truth out of Underhill if he had to kill him by inches."

"The truth about what?"

"About the gold mine. Don't pretend, Fallon. You are not a very good dissembler. You know about the mine."

"Yes."

"You are interested in the mine also?"

"I am interested in finding Lin Underhill for his father and for a girl who loves him."

"Ah! Tell me about her, Fallon! It must be wonderful to be loved!"

"Have you been loved?" Fallon's lips tightened.

"By none, monsieur. The only men I have seen have been the men that have come to this house. They have been thieves and gamblers and murderers. One man I might have loved had I been able to see more of him. The good man I spoke about. He was much like you."

"You loved him?"

"I might have loved him. I do not know. I did not talk with him. He may have been jealous—and I should not love a jealous man. He may have been presumptuous—and for that I should not love him. But if he had been

brave and faithful and straightforward, and would trust me completely, I might have loved him. Also, before I should love him I should want to be certain that he had never loved another woman."

Fallon stared at the floor. At one point he did not fit into her specifications—he was jealous. The bravery and the faithfulness and the straightforwardness he might strive for.

He looked up at her.

"You would not love a jealous man, and yet you would not love a man who had been loved by another woman. Isn't that jealousy?"

"I think not. Yet whether it is or not I should not want a man with half a heart. He must be all mine, and he must not have loved another woman." She tapped a foot on the floor and watched it as she added: "I expect I shall never fall in love. I shall be hard to satisfy. I shall not fall in love at first sight. I shall take my time. I shall want to study him. I should want to know from observation something about his character. I should want to know if little things annoy him. I shouldn't want to choose a man who would growl over the breakfast table, who would fret and storm because I should happen to stay out late with another man—at a party or a dance. I should want to test him by having him watch another man make love to me—or try to make love to me. Of course I really would not permit that, but I should like to see what he would do."

"A man who would be worthy of loving you would kill him," Fallon declared.

"Would you kill a man who attempted to win the woman you loved?"

"I would," said Fallon, frowning at the floor.

"Then you are jealous," she charged.

"I don't deny it."

"It was jealousy that caused you to break Denatti's sword and, afterward, to knock him down."

Fallon nodded.

"You did not like the way he spoke about—about my night garment? And yet Denatti really said nothing offensive."

"It was the way he looked at you."

"Looks, monsieur. What is there in a glance?"

"He said you were ravishing."

"And what did you think, monsieur? Did you think I looked dowdy?"

Fallon frowned.

"What I thought I shall keep to myself," he said. "I do not like men to flatter and compliment women."

"You never compliment women, Fallon?"

"I think it is a foolish habit."

"Then the woman you fall in love with will never receive a compliment from you? You will never tell her that she is pretty?—if she is or if she isn't; you will never tell her that she is a good housekeeper?—whether she is or not. Fallon, you will have to lie a great deal when you marry! You will never tell her that you love her?"

"I suppose I should tell her that."

"And that would be a concession, I suppose? Fallon, your wife will have no easy time of it with you."

She stood up and smiled down at him. But Fallon did not look up at her. He sat staring at the floor, and she gazed lingeringly at his shapely head, with its black

hair, which was ruffled and tousled; at his broad shoulders and his mighty arms. A blush burned in her cheeks and her eyes took on a soft radiance. She moved to a small dressing table and gazed at her reflection in a mirror. Her expression was a blend of curiosity, amazement, and joy. But she was a picture of serenity and coolness when she stepped away from the mirror and again looked at Fallon, who had not moved.

"Monsieur, how do you expect to find Lin Underhill?"

"I am going to stay here until I do. I am going to search the house."

"Have you had supper?"

"No."

"Of course you will not be able to appear downstairs for your meals."

"That would be impertinent—and foolhardy," smiled Fallon.

"I have a fowl—beautifully roasted—and other food that was brought to me at noon to-day, by Mowaki, Randall's Japanese cook. You are welcome to it. It is in the next room. There is also a bed there, and water. It is the room my mother occupied while she stayed here, and it has never been touched or disturbed in any manner except by myself. The connecting door locks from this room. There is an outside door leading into the hallway. It has no lock but is fitted with fastenings on the inside. I think you will have to take the room, Fallon, if you expect to stay here to search for Underhill. And you will have to be very careful, for if they see you they will kill you."

A few minutes later, with a lamp in hand, Fallon

entered the adjoining room. He closed the door and heard Denise slip the fastenings into place.

The room was about the size of the one he had just left, but its furnishings were severely plain and meager. There were in the room such articles as might have been considered luxurious twenty or twenty-five years before, but time and disuse had exacted their toll. It was, though, a room to satisfy Fallon, who would have been satisfied with the bed alone.

The window shades were down, and the first thing that Fallon did after closing the door was to walk to one of the two windows, push the shade aside, and stand there with the lamp in hand. There was a risk in this action, but Fallon ignored it that he might inform Watanooka that all was well with him.

Dropping the shade, he feasted upon the food that he found on a small table standing against the wall that divided the room from Denise's. The food was covered with a cloth.

The bed looked inviting, but Fallon had no intention of sleeping until he made a search for Underhill. Denise's news that Randall had hidden Underhill in a place known only to Randall himself was slightly disconcerting, for that meant, probably, that Underhill would not be found in any of the rooms. Yet the rooms must be searched on the chance that Randall had been lying, or had changed his mind.

The search could not be made until later. Undoubtedly, as Revella had told Denise, Randall's friends, and Denatti's also, would certainly try to kill him if they should find him, and Fallon had little doubt that they were at this minute searching the house for him.

He decided to delay starting his search until he was reasonably certain Randall's friends were asleep, so he took off his moccasins, unstrapped his cartridge belt and pistol, and stretched out on the bed. He would be able to get a few hours' sleep before he started his nocturnal prowling; but he had no intention of going to sleep immediately—not until he did some more thinking about Denise Laville.

For he had been thinking about Denise more than he had been thinking of Lin Underhill. Since the instant he had met her he had not been able to stop thinking about her. And now he was wondering what had been back of her half-earnest, half-amused raillery while he had been in her room. He could make nothing of it except that she knew he had fallen in love with her and that she had gently told him that his affection was not reciprocated. She wouldn't tell him outright, because to do so would be to imply that she knew of his love for her. Wise. She knew, but wouldn't let on. Letting him down easy.

He went to sleep thinking about Denise. He wasn't worried about Randall, Denatti, Revella, and the other men who at this minute were searching the house for him. They were men, enemies, and when the time came he would take care of them. But it was different with Denise. He couldn't deal with her as he was in the habit of dealing with men. Already he had found that out.

He had left the lamp burning, and he had gone to sleep lying on his right side, facing a fireplace in the wall that formed one side of the hallway. The fireplace was not as large as the one in front of which he had been standing when Randall had thrown the knife at him, but like the

other it was built entirely of stone, with a mantel shelf similar in design and shape.

There was no fire in the grate and apparently had been none in it for a long time. Nor were there any ashes on the stone hearth. Apparently the fireplace had not been in use since Denise's mother had died, for as Fallon had gazed at it just before going to sleep he had observed on the hearthstone a thick accumulation of dust.

And now, after having slept for what seemed to him to have been only a few minutes—although in reality he had slept several hours—he opened his eyes suddenly, as one sometimes awakens when hearing a sharp, strange sound. His faculties were alert, but he did not move. His gaze, oddly enough, was upon the stone hearth of the fireplace, where it had been when he had gone to sleep.

He heard a slight scraping noise, subdued, muffled, apparently coming from a distance. He listened intently, thinking the sound came from downstairs, or at least from the farther end of the hallway. And while he watched and listened he observed that the hearthstone was in motion. Slowly, little by little, it was being raised by some unseen force beneath it.

Chapter XIX

THE lamp, which was still where Fallon had placed it on the table, was burning, and the room was flooded with its weak, ruddy glare. The lower sashes of the two windows in the room were open, and a slight, chill breeze came in, bearing with it the dank, moist, spruce-laden scent of the forest and the diapason of the night insects. There was no sound from inside the house except the dull, heavy rasping of the hearthstone as it was stealthily agitated.

There was no sound from Denise Laville's room. Fallon made no sound as he sat erect and twisted himself around on the edge of the bed so that he faced the fireplace. His revolver was lying on the bed where he had placed it. He slipped his moccasins on his feet, buckled the cartridge belt about his waist, drew out the heavy revolver and twirled the cylinder to make certain it was filled, then cautiously crossed the room and stepped behind the west end of the chimney breast.

The breast was deep and by flattening himself against the wall he could conceal himself from the intruder. He did not extinguish the light, for it may have been seen, and putting it out would warn the uninvited visitor that his presence under the hearthstone had been discovered. And Fallon was very curious.

Peering around the corner of the chimney, Fallon

watched the hearthstone. It moved only slightly, with a twisting, heaving motion, as though whoever was under it was exerting his lifting force in its center. It was fitted loosely in its stone frame, and Fallon could see no reason why a great deal of force should be required to move it. The explanation came presently, however, when at each side of the stone finally appeared the links of an iron chain, the links so fashioned as to form handles by which the stone might be lifted from above. And now Fallon also observed that in the stone frame were two loose stones, one on each side, which hid the chain handles from view. Whoever wished to lift the hearthstone from above needed only to remove the two small stones covering the handles.

But what was under the hearthstone? Fallon speculated upon this question as he watched the stone slowly rise. Gail Hammond had told him that this was a very mysterious house, with towers and secret rooms and subterranean passages and channels in it, but it seemed that in addition to these there were secret passages from room to room. As a matter of fact, in the thick walls and under or between the heavy floors there was room for a system of secret passages which would permit the unscrupulous inhabitants of the house to murder people in their beds.

Fallon now had no doubt that Revella or some of the others had discovered that he had been in Denise Laville's room, and suspected she had hidden him in the room that had belonged to her mother. Being aware of the secret passages, they were now coming to kill him. Fortunately, having spent a great deal of his life in the open, where a man's sensitiveness to strange

sounds is imperative to his safety, he had awakened in time. And it had been the rasping of the hearthstone that had awakened him.

The stone came clear of its socket. It was lifted only a few inches above the level of the stone frame around it, and then it began to move backward, toward the arch of the fireplace. Two great, brown hands were moving it, and a mass of black hair appeared in the vaultlike opening. Then a head and a pair of great, brown, brawny shoulders emerged, and for an instant were motionless as their owner stared at the bed.

The head turned, and two black, penetrating eyes rested upon Fallon. A wide mouth curved and stretched into a delighted grin.

"Ugh!" whispered the intruder, "Wattanooka find um!"

Silently Fallon stepped away from the chimney and took his friend's hand. Then, their voices so low that they could not be heard even by Denise in the next room, they spoke of the secret passage which opened in the fireplace.

Wattanooka was covered with cobwebs, which he brushed from his coppery body as he talked.

He had watched for Fallon's signals, as he had agreed to do. But he had also used his eyes to watch for other things. And after dark he had moved around. He had seen a great deal, and he had heard much. He had stolen close to the Indian village and had concealed himself for a time in some brush which was near enough to their campfire to permit him to overhear what was being said. The Indians were Crees, and he a Chippewa, and he hated them, but he had listened. The Indians

had spoken of a large number of white men who were coming to the stone house. Randall had sent for them. They were expected almost any day now, for the chief had sent runners to a harbor on the coast of Hudson Bay. The men were to come in a ship, and the runners were to lead them through the wilderness to the stone house. There they would stay until Randall had need for them. Wattanooka had feared he was not to discover what the newcomers were to be used for, but finally a brave had asked the question and had been answered. The newcomers were to be used to exterminate the inhabitants of Mercie Valley—the valley which had been for many years in possession of Adam Hammond and his family and the Chippewas who lived there with him. The men who were coming were sea rogues who had been assembled by a man who knew where to find such men. They were accomplished blood-letters.

When Wattanooka had heard all this he had worked his way back to the river to a point where he could watch the house. On his previous trip to the house he had observed some peculiar formations of rocks here and there along the river bank, but he had not got close enough to them to examine them. But this time he inspected them, and had found strange things. In one formation he had discovered that one of the rocks seemed to have been cut to fit among the others. He found he could move it aside, and when he had done so he was amazed to find an opening to a tunnel. He had gone into the tunnel and lighted a faggot. And he had explored the tunnel for quite a distance, to find that it intersected other tunnels—some large, some small. He had explored the largest tunnel and had found

chimney-like apertures in the ceiling. These openings had excited his interest and he had discovered iron ladders running up into them. He had climbed one ladder until he had come to a stone that barred his further progress. Then he had laid his ear to the stone and had heard Fallon's voice, and a woman's. The voices were faint.

When Wattanooka reached this point he grinned widely.

"Who woman?" he asked.

"Denise Laville."

"How old?"

"Twenty-three."

"White woman?"

Fallon nodded.

"She child Adam Hammond see here?" said Wattanooka. "Hammond tell me girl's mother die. Father die before. Girl stay with Randall. Woman now. Good woman. How she look?"

"She is beautiful."

"Like Gail?"

"Yes."

"It is good. How Randall?"

"Randall had his skull cracked."

"Who crack—you?"

Fallon nodded and Wattanooka grinned expansively.

"You strong man. Crack um good?"

"Too good. Randall will die, and he alone knows where Underhill is hidden."

"We find," said Wattanooka. "Come. Look."

Wattanooka whispered to Fallon to go down the

shaft under the fireplace, and Fallon was poised over the opening when a slight sound at the door leading to the hallway brought him up rigid. The Indian had heard the sound also, for a finger went to his lips and he too became rigid.

The room was big, and the hall doorway was in a recess at the east of the fireplace, so that it was hardly possible that anyone in the hall could have overheard Fallon and Wattanooka whispering; but the two waited to determine what the noise beyond the door might mean. It was not long before they knew they had not been overheard, for they heard the door creaking from a steady pressure and they knew that someone was testing the strength of the fastenings. As it was unlikely that anyone would try to enter so stealthily after hearing voices in the room, it was evident that whoever was outside the door suspected that Fallon was asleep. The attempt to gain entrance to the room could mean only one thing—that one of the searchers had seen the light shining through the slight crevice between the threshold and the door and had concluded that Denise had hidden Fallon in the room. There could be no doubt about the purpose of his errand.

There was a chance that the prowler would go away, so Fallon and the Indian remained motionless, listening. But no; he was still there. He had ceased shoving at the door, no doubt realizing that the fastenings were in place or were too strong to be broken by the pressure he was able to exert. For now through a crack in the door came the blade of a long knife. The gleaming metal was under the wooden bar which served as a fastening,

and the purpose of the knife wielder was to lift the bar above the sockets. That task accomplished, he had only to swing the door open and enter.

There was a chance that he would succeed, and Wattanooka grinned broadly and touched the blade of his belt-ax.

This was a huge weapon. It had a light, narrow head and a broad, convex blade which had been ground to razorlike sharpness. It resembled a type of Roman battle-ax.

Wattanooka drew it and gripped it by its fluted handle. Then he leaned closer to Fallon and whispered: "Him Cree knife." He pointed to the blade which was in the crack of the door. The crack ran at a sharp angle through the heavy wood, so that whoever was outside had not been able to see into the room through it, and it was so small that much time would be required by the knife wielder to enlarge the crack enough to accomplish his purpose.

"You lay on bed—sleep," continued Wattanooka. "Cree open door—see you sleep. Him come in. Wattanooka step on neck."

Fallon obeyed. He quietly stretched himself upon the bed. He was fully dressed, but he drew the blanket over him. He was on his right side, facing the door, and he drew his gun and rested it along his thigh, under the blanket. Wattanooka slipped over into the recess near the door, so that he would be behind it when it opened.

Fallon pretended to sleep. The knife widened the crack under the bar on the door. Grimly Wattanooka watched the whittlings drop to the floor near his feet.

Finally the crack was widened sufficiently to permit

the knife to do its work. The bar began to lift, making no noise whatever. It finally went over the top of the socket and was held there. Then the door began to move inward, slowly, an inch at a time.

When halfway open it stopped. The intruder was evidently looking at the supposedly sleeping Fallon.

Apparently he was satisfied. He could see Fallon, and perhaps he could see the edge of the hearthstone and a portion of the hole that gaped at its edge. For as he stepped into the room his head was turned toward the fireplace and his back was toward Wattanooka. The man was an Indian.

And at that instant Wattanooka struck. He had been holding the belt-ax in his left hand, and as he struck his right hand gripped the Cree's knife. The heavy pole of the ax landed with a queer, hollow thump on the top of the Cree's head, and so swiftly was it done that Fallon, who had opened his eyes at the instant, saw only a faint glint as the metal cleaved the air.

The Cree slumped forward without a sound. He was doubled forward in Wattanooka's arms when Fallon slipped out of the bed, and his long knife had dropped from his loosening fingers into Wattanooka's right hand.

Wattanooka handled the Cree as an ordinary man would handle a child. With his right hand holding the Cree's knife, he closed the door and softly dropped the bar into place. Then, with Fallon watching him curiously, he laid the Cree on the floor, face up, and placed a moccasined foot on his neck. As Fallon started forward to interfere, his black eyes flashed warningly, and he whispered through grim lips:

"No can do, Fallon. Cree kill my brother. Cut um up.

Wattanooka kill Cree—step on neck. 'Leven—now. See foot on neck—know who do."

Fallon comprehended. The foot on the Cree's neck was Wattanooka's trade-mark, his insignia of vengeance. The blow with the ax had killed the Cree anyway. But Fallon turned his back.

After a while, when he heard a sound behind him, he turned to see Wattanooka carrying the Cree through the doorway. Wattanooka vanished down the hallway, leaving the door open. When he returned, ax in hand, he grunted the one word—"Good!"

Grinning at Fallon as though nothing had happened, he pointed to the shaft under the hearthstone.

Fallon went down, his moccasined feet feeling for the rungs of the iron ladder which was fastened against a stone wall. After he had descended a little distance he saw Wattanooka enter the shaft. For a time the Indian remained at the top, evidently arranging the chain handles of the hearthstone so that they would not be seen; and then the light in the room was blotted out, and Fallon could hear Wattanooka's feet slithering lightly on the iron rungs as he descended.

The distance down was not great, for the ceilings of the house were low, and presently Fallon felt his feet come in contact with a stone floor. He moved away from the ladder and a moment later he felt Wattanooka beside him. A sulphur match flared up, burning with a greenish-yellow flame and assailing Fallon's nostrils with its acrid odor, and in its light he saw Wattanooka stooping to ignite a faggot which he had evidently left at the foot of the ladder when he had prepared to ascend the shaft.

The men were in a tunnel-like passage which had been cut through rotted rock. It was irregular in shape but its makers had apparently attempted to follow a circular pattern. The atmosphere was musty with the vitiated air of a quarter of a century. Its odor was like that of an ancient and long-unused cellar. Great patches of mold clung to the crevices. The stone floor was slippery with an accumulation of black moss, and there was a continual dripping of water from the roof.

The black smoke from Wattanooka's faggot spread in low streamers around the men. There was so little vitality in the air that the men were forced to breathe heavily, and the flame from the faggot threw only a weak glare into their faces. Beyond the limited radius of the light was blackness.

Fallon had been wondering how Wattanooka had chanced to find the particular shaft that led to the room in which Denise had placed him, and now he questioned the Indian.

"Him no hard," was Wattanooka's reply. "You call um 'shaft,' eh? All room got shaft. Count shaft, count room from outside. See you stand in window with light. Same in back; same on other side."

The system of subterranean passages was ingenious and had undoubtedly been planned with murder as its sinister purpose. It would be easy for Randall, or anyone familiar with the underground passages, to enter any of the various rooms and do away with an unsuspecting or sleeping guest. But Fallon and Wattanooka did not desire to enter any of the rooms at present. Fallon especially was interested in the passages themselves, for he had a conviction that some-

where under the house Lin Underhill was being held.

There were several smaller tunnels or passages intersecting the main one, and the two men found other shafts that seemed to run upward into the house. But so far as they were able to see there was no place where Lin Underhill might be concealed. After they had explored all the passages they found, Wattanooka led Fallon to the mound of rocks at the river bank where he had first entered. They were glad to catch a breath of fresh air, and they climbed out of the tunnel and sat for a while on the rocks at the edge of the river bank, talking over the situation.

By this time Fallon was convinced that Underhill was in one of the rooms in the house, probably hidden in a secret place known only to Randall himself. He was eager to search the rooms through the shafts that ran from the subterranean passages, but Wattanooka pointed to the sky, eastward, where a streak of gray swam above the horizon.

"No go now," he advised; "wait 'nother night. You go back to room. Wattanooka come here to-night."

He leaped like a shadow to the dense growth along the river bank, and vanished. Keen of eye though he was, Fallon could not tell in which direction he had gone.

Fallon replaced the rock which Wattanooka had dislodged to enter the tunnel. There were some faggots scattered about, which had probably been brought there by some previous user of the tunnel, and Fallon took several of them with him on his return to the shaft that led to his room.

He had no difficulty in finding the right shaft, nor did he experience any trouble in lifting the hearthstone,

and he stepped noiselessly into his room just as dawn was breaking. He replaced the hearthstone, saw that the fastenings of the door leading into the hall were in place, undressed, and got into bed.

In his life there had been some strange experiences, but none as strange as he had encountered since reaching the stone house. It seemed incredible that such things could be—that there could be a man like Lumly Randall, who was a relic of the days of the sea rovers; that a man like Denatti could step into this century from the preceding one, or that the stone house itself should be standing in this untracked wilderness. But here they were—the stone house and its amazing inhabitants. The people were real, because he had met them. The house was real, because he was in it; the subterranean passages were here, because he had been through them. Denise Laville was here, because she had woven a spell about him. And he went to sleep thinking of her.

Chapter XX

ONCE again Fallon's peculiar sensitiveness to strange sounds awakened him, and he raised his head to listen.

The sun was high. Light streamed into the room between the curtains and the casings of the windows. Outside, birds were chirping. A south wind, lazily sweeping over the vast wilderness, brought to him the refreshing aroma of the pine and spruce forests whose green foliage it had touched on its pilgrimage. Only the house was somber. Its stone floors, its dark, damp walls, its heavy doors and its barred windows; the brooding atmosphere that engulfed it—were depressing. The house itself was an anachronism, and the people in it were human remnants of a day that was gone. And yet in this house Fallon had found the romance of which he had dreamed. And he was satisfied. It made no difference to him that he had to fight bloody pirates, swashbuckling gentlemen of the sword, fops, dandies, doctors who made horrible puns about skull-cracking, cockney sailors wearing baldrics and carrying halberds. He was not concerned over the fact that there were still more of these strange characters about—Killen, Mortwell, Atkins, Eccles, as Meeson had named them; or that Wattanooka had told him that a large body of white men was coming to the house from the

coast. The thought that he was to have greater opposition merely stirred him to enthusiasm.

The sound was repeated. This time, his senses alert, he discovered that the sound came from the door leading to Denise's room. Denise's voice, calling him. He laid his ear against the heavy planks and whispered the one word: "Denise!"

He heard Denise gasp.

"Oh!" she said. "Are you all right, Fallon?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"Yes. I'm all right. Oh, I'm so glad. I thought something had happened to you. Come in as soon as you can, please. I'll unfasten the door."

Fallon washed, dressed, opened the door and saw Denise.

She was standing at one of the windows, peering out between the curtain and the sash. She turned when the door opened and Fallon observed that she was pale and agitated. She was more beautiful than she had been the night before.

Her hair was in neat coils on her shapely head and its lustrous blackness made her fair skin gleam with transparent whiteness in contrast. She wore a dress with a high bodice and an overskirt with soft, drooping flounces; black slippers and a lace scarf. Fallon could not have described her clothing; he was not interested in it. He was aware of the beauty of her face, of the sweetness of her expression, of the sturdy honesty that shone in her eyes, and of her light, graceful form, its lines merely suggested by the soft, drooping flounces.

She placed a finger over her lips to enjoin him to silence, and then stepped close to him and whispered:

"They suspect, I think. Revella insisted that I take my breakfast downstairs this morning. But I defied him. I had Mowaki bring it up, as usual. Mowaki left the door open when he came in and I saw Revella in the hallway. He pretended he wanted to say something to Mowaki, but of course he only wanted to look into my room.

"They are all half-terrorized this morning. They don't want to admit it, but they are. Something terrible happened during the night. A Cree Indian was murdered. He was in the house. How he happened to enter I do not know. But he was found in the upper hallway this morning by Mortwell. His neck had been broken and there was the mark of a foot on his throat—the print of a moccasin. They tell me it is the death mark of a Chippewa Indian named Wattanooka, who has a feud with the Crees. The Crees in the village are wailing and lamenting. But they are terrorized, too. They say this is the eleventh man Wattanooka has killed. They say he is a terrible fighter, and terribly strong. They are huddled together and refuse to leave the village. Since this has happened not another Cree will ever enter this house—they could not be dragged in."

With Wattanooka having the run of the secret passages, the Crees would be wise to stay out of the house, decided Fallon. Which was well enough.

It had been Revella or Denatti or one of the others who had set the Cree to the task of opening the door, of course, for, having searched all the other rooms and finding the outside doors locked or fastened from the inside, they would know that Denise had sheltered him. Denise did not know that she was suspected or she

would have divined Revella's reason for insisting that she take her breakfast downstairs. They had probably hoped to have her out of her room long enough to give them an opportunity to search it. Fallon decided to take her into his confidence, and he led her into his room, where he showed her the crack in the hall door which had been widened by the Cree's knife, and the knife itself, which was lying on the mantel where Wattanooka had left it. Whispering, he told her of Wattanooka's visit, how the powerful Indian had entered the room by removing the hearthstone, and what he and Wattanooka had been doing during the night. He then removed the hearthstone and showed her the dark shaft leading down.

Denise was amazed. She stood beside the shaft and her eyes grew wide with dawning horror. The blood seemed to drain from her cheeks; she closed her eyes and sagged limply forward into Fallon's arms.

Fallon held her tightly. Her lovely head rested limply on his arm. She had fainted.

And now, holding her so closely, Fallon observed that under her eyes were the dark shadows that are caused by mental agony or worry, and he divined that life in this house for her must be torture. A flood of pity swept over him, intensifying the passion that had taken possession of him last night when he had seen her in the darkened room with the light from the lamp shining on her. He laid his cheek against hers, reverently caressing her, while he thrilled with an ecstasy so great that he trembled.

But he was himself again when a few minutes later he revived her. He had taken her into her own room,

where he had placed her in a chair, and he was lightly bathing her face when she opened her eyes, drew a shuddering breath, and smiled faintly.

"I am sorry," she said. "I was shocked, I think. The thought I had when I saw the shaft was more than I could stand. I was thinking of the many men who have been murdered in their beds in this house." She shuddered again and covered her face with her hands. When she again looked at Fallon her gaze was steady and her lips firm.

"Are all the rooms in this house like that? Can all of them be entered like that?"

"All."

"Mine also?" She sat erect and stared at the fireplace. The hearthstone was covered with a bearskin. Fallon lifted the rug and glanced at the stone, nodding his head to confirm her fears, although he already knew there was a shaft there.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

She sat for a time staring straight ahead. She was evidently thinking of the dark deeds she had mentioned, for occasionally she shivered as if a cold wind were striking her. Suddenly she straightened.

"It was Lumly Randall!" she said. "Lumly Randall murdered all of them. He was the only one that knew the shafts were there. Even now the others do not know or they would have entered your room that way instead of sending the Cree to open the door."

Fallon nodded. He had reached the same conclusion.

Denise had many questions to ask about the subterranean passages, and she asked them while she and Fallon ate the food that the Japanese, Mowaki, had

brought for her breakfast. There was more than enough for both.

The necessity of holding their conversation in whispers gave a clandestine appearance and atmosphere to this meeting, which, since it was held in Denise's bedroom, already suggested intimacy that did not exist. That Denise felt it was apparent from her frequent blushes, but that made her only more charming in Fallon's eyes.

But though Fallon was aware of her blushes, he was blind to the glances the girl gave him when after breakfast, with their chairs close together, they continued to whisper. The blushes, Fallon assumed, were blushes of embarrassment. It did not occur to him that there could be another cause for embarrassment, and other reasons for blushing.

Last night she had held him off with light banter, showing him that while she knew of his passion for her she would not encourage it. She had made it plain to him that she would never think seriously of a jealous man, and then she had made him confess that he was jealous. She had slyly poked fun at him; she had gently ridiculed him.

She was wise and clever. She had used weapons that were most effective. She had seen how it was with him, and had warded off a declaration, or the possibility of a declaration. She couldn't have made it plainer to him if she had calmly told him she did not want him.

He wasn't likely to lose his head again. Any woman he might want would have to want him, also. There would be no halfway measures with him, and no love that would be all on one side. In everything he had

ever undertaken he had gone all the way through, and he wouldn't throw himself at any woman when he suspected that she did not want him. He had lost his head when he had caressed her while carrying her into her room after she had fainted; and he had got a fierce joy out of that instant, and did not regret it. The point was that she had not known what had happened.

He sat with his arms folded, staring at the floor. They had been silent for a time, listening. There was no sound inside the house.

"Why do you sit and stare at the floor, monsieur?" she said. "Your name is Jim, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"The floor is interesting, I suppose?"

Bantering him again. Randall had told him that he had an eye that would never waver under a woman's gaze. Bah! That was more of Randall's insincerity. Fallon couldn't have met Denise's eyes at this minute for a room filled with gold. If she loved him—yes. But he was too elemental to endure ridicule. From a man it would have brought on violence; from a woman it brought only a mighty embarrassment.

"I stare at the floor because I want to stare at it, I suppose," he answered gruffly.

"It is a stone floor, I perceive."

"Yes—a stone floor."

"And rather little different from other stone floors, I suppose?"

"I haven't noticed it particularly."

"He stares at it and yet he doesn't notice it particularly," she said, as if speaking to herself. Fallon felt her

gaze resting upon him. She seemed to be listening again. Then she said:

"Do you often stare at things without seeing them?"

He grinned wryly but did not answer.

"Do you, Jim?"

"I don't know. I've never noticed."

He turned and observed that she was watching him contemplatively. He reddened and stared at the floor again. He felt she was deliberately amusing herself and he decided that to-morrow he would join Wattanooka in the forest rather than stay in the house and subject himself to her jibes. And yet the jibes were gentle ones, and her voice low and soft.

"You forgot to comb your hair this morning, Jim," she said, after another silence.

"I saw no comb."

"There is one on the washstand. I saw it there last night—when I took you into the room."

"When I heard you I thought you were in trouble."

"And you hurried, and forgot to comb your hair. What sort of trouble did you suppose I had got into?"

"Well; there's Denatti and Revella and some more of those scoundrels. One of them might have gotten into your room."

"Jim!"

"Well."

"I would have screamed."

She sat looking at him. And he was silent.

"The woman you marry will receive no compliments from you, Jim," she said. "You do not think it worth while to compliment a woman, do you, Jim? For you

had an opportunity, and you neglected it. If you had said that you had forgotten to comb your hair through eagerness to greet me, I would have believed you. But that wasn't the reason, was it?"

"Yes; that was the reason."

"And you saw the comb, after all?"

"I saw the comb."

He turned now and met her gaze. His eyes were somber but determined.

"Look here," he said. "There's no use in trying to deceive you. I can see that. You've known since last night that I love you. I was so eager to see you this morning that I would have torn the door down to get to you, if necessary. And you know it. You knew it last night—when I first looked at you."

"How do you know I knew it?" Her serenity was maddening, but still her voice was gentle.

"You were careful to keep me from declaring it last night."

"You loved me then, Jim?"

Fallon laughed. It was a mirthless laugh though, and in it was the disappointment of the disillusioned who perceives no hope of the fulfillment of his dreams. There was no harshness in it; the laugh was at himself—at his weakness. There was no bitterness.

"Loved you then? Sure. Then and now. Forever. My dear lady, love comes to Jim Fallon only once. It has been rejected, and so it will never again be offered. Can you see now, ma'am, why it should not be made sport of?"

She was calm, but her eyes were very bright, and her voice still gentle—perhaps more gentle than ever. And

she laughed so lowly that the sound of it could not be heard at the door.

"Is there such a thing as love at first sight, Jim?"

"I always thought people were fools who said there was. Now I am a fool who has experienced it."

"And how do you know when love comes, Jim?"

He turned his head from her and stared again at the floor. His hands were cupped to support his chin. He made a picture of dejection as he sat there. But Denise only smiled faintly, with her gaze on his tousled hair.

"It's a madness, I think," he declared. "I thought it would never strike me."

"Is it so that there has been no woman in your life, Jim?"

"Women—yes. Love—no."

She frowned. Her lips were pressed tightly together. Her eyes flashed.

"What kind of women were they, Jim?"

Her frankness startled him. He glanced at her, observed the disapprobation in her eyes, and again stared at the floor. He did not answer.

"Women you have picked up here and there, I suppose?" There was contempt in her voice.

Fallon did not answer.

She was very still for a moment. Then in a level tone she went on:

"That is a strange thing, Jim. A man roams the world, laughing at love but making conquests of all the women who are foolish enough to listen to him. Mark you. Some of the women may have loved him. But he does not care. In his selfishness he can see no one but himself. Then one day he meets a woman he thinks he

loves. And he is still selfish. He is jealous of her. He wants to think of no other man in connection with her. I could never love a man like that, Jim."

He looked at her. His eyes were still somber. He smiled faintly.

"Well," he said, "that's the kind of a man I have been. There are women who don't care about a man's past life. They believe that when a man offers what he thinks is sincere love they should accept it at its face value." His smile expanded. He was hurt and was trying not to show it. He added: "At least I haven't played the hypocrite with you. There are many women who haven't been told what I have told you."

"No," she said meditatively, "you are not a hypocrite, Jim. One needs to look at you only to know that. You are a bold man. A reckless man. Ruthless passions lie under the surface calm that you show to people—that you have shown to me. You are not a hypocrite. No. But are you the kind of man who would be always faithful to the woman he marries; who would be steady and reliable; who would stay by her side year after year, working and building for her? You are an adventurer. You would find it hard to stay in one place, to face the monotony of married life. You would be wanting to set out on some wild expedition to some new country; you would fret and fume and wear your soul with impatience to be doing things that would take you away from your wife. You would tire of your wife as you would tire of any place or thing that would tie you down. And when you grew tired of your wife you would have the courage to tell her so. That would be a noble thing to do, Jim, but it would not help your

wife any. Isn't that the kind of man you are, Jim?"

"Well, that's the kind of man you seem to think I am," he answered. "I don't know. I've never taken myself apart like that, but I've a different opinion of myself than you seem to have. I saw you and I love you. I think I shall always love you. But you don't love me, and that's an end of it."

"I haven't known you quite twenty-four hours yet, Jim."

He smiled.

"It seems like twenty-four years to me," he said.

"Did the time seem long after—after those other women?"

"I don't remember."

"Who were the other women?"

"I don't remember their names."

She smiled, watching him from under lowered lids. And she said quietly: "I should not care to be a woman whose name you would not remember."

He couldn't blame her for that. He had known at first glance that she was not a woman to be trifled with, and the thought of attempting it had not entered his mind. He had known she was wise and clever and uncompromisingly honest. And now she had shown him that she was as honest with him as with herself. She did not love him, but he felt that even then her attitude would have been the same. She would have to be sure.

He faced her now, and his embarrassment was gone. Somehow she had cleared the mental fog that had confused him. Some of the glamour of his enchantment had departed, but in its place was a deeper, purer passion.

He got up, bent over her, and placed his hands on her shoulders, not moving until she looked up and met his gaze. Amazed, she trembled and was silent. His voice was steady.

"Denise," he said, "you are my woman."

He released her, stepped back a little, and bowed to her. And while she sat in the chair, watching him, he went into the other room and closed the door behind him.

For a time Denise did not move. Then she got up, fastened the door that Fallon had closed, and stood for a moment, smiling faintly. Then she moved to the mirror and gazed at her reflection in the glass. Her cheeks were aglow, and her eyes were mystic with a light that she had never seen in them before. She placed both hands—clasped—against her neck, at the spot where Fallon's lips had caressed it when he had carried her from his room to hers, and squeezed the hands tightly between her neck and shoulders. Then the smile faded from her lips.

For she no longer saw the mirror. She was looking through it and beyond it, at a mental picture, a vision of the past—Fallon's past. She could see Fallon's face. Grouped around Fallon were half a dozen women—beautiful women with audacious eyes and alluring smiles. Their lips were parted; they appeared to be waiting for him to turn and look at them. And Fallon was smiling. He turned his head toward one of the girls. . . .

Denise covered her eyes with her hands.

Chapter XXI

FALLON did not see Denise again that day. Shortly after his talk with her he slipped into the shaft below the fireplace, drew the hearthstone into place, and descended to the system of tunnels under the house. With lighted faggots he searched the various tunnels and shafts diligently, but could find no place where Underhill might be concealed. At dusk he went to the end of the tunnel where Wattanooka had left him that morning. He opened the tunnel and climbed to the mound of rocks, first cautiously peering about to see if he was observed. Satisfied that there was no lurking Cree in the vicinity, he worked his way down the rocky bank to the river and drank sparingly of the sparkling water. He had been in the subterranean passages all afternoon and he appreciated the fresh, invigorating air that he drew into his lungs.

The river bed near the mouth of the tunnel was at the base of a clifflike formation of huge rocks, and the great granite slope that led upward to the house began at the top of the cliff, so that Fallon was really at the bottom of a gorge after he had reached the river bed. The river was not more than twenty or thirty feet wide at this point, and there were breaks in the rock wall on the southern side where the banks sloped to the water's edge. These slopes were covered with a dense growth of willows and scrub pines which gradually merged with the forest. And the forest at this point was

a wild tangle of trees and undergrowth growing so densely that to the eye it appeared to be practically impassable. There was a narrow strip of sand at the base of the rock wall where Fallon stood, a sort of a bar which had been created by the steady sweeping of the water around a bend forty or fifty feet distant.

It had been into one of the breaks on the opposite side of the river that Wattanooka had vanished when he had left Fallon that morning, and Fallon rather expected the Indian to reappear there to keep his promised appointment. But as Fallon stood there listening, after drinking, he heard no sound to tell him that Wattanooka was coming. Dusk was yielding to darkness, and he was turning to go back to the tunnel entrance, fearing that he would not be able to find it when the darkness grew deeper, when he saw a broad-bladed caribou spear dart out of the willows on the bank opposite him and come hurtling toward him. The spear fell short. It had traveled slowly, so slowly that it began to fall point first before it reached the middle of the river.

Fallon saw no one. He had thought he had glimpsed a brown arm at the edge of the willows just as the spear was thrown, but he could not be sure. But now the willows were agitated. There came a rustling of leaves, a cracking of twigs. Then silence. Fallon's gun had leaped into his right hand by the time the spear had struck the water, but he had vainly scanned the willows for sight of an enemy. Now he stood, waiting for darkness to come so that he could return to the tunnel mouth without fear of being seen by an enemy. He waited a full quarter of an hour, and then, as nothing happened and the bed of the river became swathed in blackness,

he climbed the rocks, found the tunnel opening, and prepared to descend. Poised on the edge of the opening, he heard a gruff "Ugh, Fallon," from the black void at his right, and he waited, having recognized the voice as Wattanooka's.

And then the Indian was at his side, and they sat for a moment, whispering their greetings. Wattanooka laughed lowly.

"Spear of Cree too short," he said.

"You saw that, eh?"

Fallon was amazed. Yet now he knew why the spearman had failed in his cast. Wattanooka had been near.

"You got him, eh?" questioned Fallon, congratulation in his voice.

"Get um heap. Grab um arm. Break um neck. Take um back to Cree village. Show um Wattanooka 'round." He laughed again, adding: "Cree find um in morning. Him no tell about tunnel."

Wattanooka's twelfth Cree. And more terror in the Indian village.

Sitting there at the mouth of the tunnel, Fallon expressed his apprehension that Lin Underhill might die of starvation before they should find him. Denise had told him that Randall alone knew where Underhill was hidden, and Randall, near death, would not be able to disclose his whereabouts to those who would take food to him.

Wattanooka grunted.

"Ugh," he said. "We find. To-night, mebbe. Hunt in rooms."

The two friends sank into the mouth of the tunnel, and the heavy rock was dropped into place, sealing them in.

Chapter XXII

IN A big room in the eastern wing of the house Meeson was sitting on the edge of a great four-poster bed, watching Lumly Randall. Standing near him were Denatti and a man whom Meeson occasionally addressed as Mortwell. Seated in a chair near a front window was Revella. He was not looking out of the window, for it was black outside and he could not have seen anything there if he had tried. He was leaning back in the chair with his arms folded over his chest and his chin lowered, watching Randall. From where he sat he could see Randall's face. Randall's body was propped up on some pillows. His one eye was closed and he was breathing stertorously. His face was ashen, his heavy jowls were flaccid, his mouth was open. A great bandage covered his forehead and ran around to the back. He seemed to be near death.

Two other men were in the room. One was a Japanese. He stood near a doorway that led to the hall. His face was expressionless; he appeared to have no interest here, and was merely waiting. Standing near the head of the bed was Goodhull, the colorless individual who had been in the big room downstairs with Revella when Fallon had been admitted by Randall. Goodhull's eyes were glowing with contradictory emotions—malice and anxiety. It was plain that he hated Randall and

wanted him to die, yet hoped he might live for a while.

There was no woman in the room. There had been no woman except Denise in this house since Randall's Indian woman had died about a year ago. Meeson's hands had been the gentlest ones that had touched Randall during his illness. And Meeson's touch was not as gentle as it should have been. Meeson's interest in keeping Randall alive was the interest all of them had in him—to rouse him long enough to force him to tell where he had hidden Lin Underhill.

The fever and lust for gold were in the veins of all of them. Their hard faces were avid with greed and satiric with impatience.

"How is he, Doc?" asked Revella.

"Looks like the fool is done for," answered Meeson. "But it will be three or four days before I can tell. There's a chance, but it's a mighty slim one. That Fallon man certainly went into him hard."

"You mean you can tell in three or four days whether he will live or not?" questioned Revella.

"That's it."

"What will happen to him after that, if he's going to get well?"

"Chances are that even if he does improve he won't be able to talk for a week."

"By that time Underhill will have starved to death," said Denatti.

"Well, what are we going to do about it if he does?" snapped Meeson. "There's nothing I can do for the damned fool. And I didn't bust his head."

"It's a good thing for you that you didn't," said Denatti.

"It is, eh? Well, what would you have done if I had busted it?"

"I'd have let the wind out of a fat doctor."

"Why didn't you let the wind out of Fallon?" sneered Meeson. "He certainly gave you enough provocation. You ain't half as good-looking as you were."

"Stow that gab!" growled Revella. "That don't get us anywhere. We've got to find Underhill or change our anchorage. We've been here about a year, waiting for Randall to get something started. I'm getting tired of it. We haven't been able to get a word out of Underhill, and now Randall's dragged him off and we can't find him. And Randall's got his head busted and can't talk. Can't you give him a shot of something that will make him talk, Doc?"

Meeson shook his head.

There was a long silence, during which all eyes were directed at Lumly Randall, who continued to breathe heavily, unaware of the presence of his friends.

"We've had Underhill in the house about six months," said Goodhull. "We ought to have got something out of him by this time."

No one paid any attention to Goodhull. And Goodhull went on:

"And now it looks like we never will get anything out of him. What do you suppose that man Fallon came here for? Are there any of you damn fools enough to think that Blandin sent him here? And if Blandin did send him how does it come that that Indian, Wattanooka, is here too? Where is Fallon? And where is Wattanooka? They are both in the house, I tell you! They must be! Every night we have seen that the

doors were barred. Who broke the Cree's neck? Who put Wattanooka's trade-mark on him? Wattanooka, of course. Who else? I tell you I'm getting spooky, staying in this house!"

Revella spoke.

"They found another Cree with a broken neck to-night," he said. "Wattanooka's mark was on him. They found him at the edge of the Indian village. The Crees are ready to break and run. There's two things we've got to do: We've got to find Underhill and we've got to kill that neck-breaker or the Crees will leave us and we won't be able to muster enough men to drive Hammond's Indians out of Mercie Valley."

Denatti smiled.

"Good advice. Certainly, all we have to do is to kill the neck-breaker and find Underhill. But what about Fallon? After the clodhopper hit me last night Denise led him through the west door of the big room, downstairs. We haven't seen Fallon since. Where is he? The doors have been barred from the inside. It is quite evident that he hasn't left the house unless Denise has slipped downstairs while we slept and barred the doors after him. But if he had left us he would have taken his pack with him. The reasonable conclusion is that he is still in the house. Revella talked to Denise last night at her bedroom door. Revella told us that he saw no signs of Fallon in her room. But Revella sent the Cree to enter the room adjoining Denise's. Did Revella think Fallon was in that room or did he have another purpose in hanging around Denise's bedroom door?"

Revella leaped to his feet. A knife flashed into his hands, but the flash of his dark eyes was more sinister

than the weapon. Denatti's sword hissed as it was drawn from the scabbard.

But Mortwell and Goodhull and Meeson were between the men, and Meeson produced a pistol.

"No more of this damned foolishness!" he said coldly. "You've heard Randall say that if anything happened to him he would depend upon me to run this house for him. And I'm running it!

"I know how it's been with you two fools for a long while. You've both got soft-headed about Denise and you are both so jealous that it's made you bigger fools than ever. And you both know that she wouldn't have either of you if you were the last men on earth. She's shown you that she thinks you are vermin! And you know what Lumly Randall thinks of you as possible lovers of his ward. Bah! If Randall was himself now he'd tear the gizzards out of you! Revella, or you, Denatti, might camp outside of the girl's room for a thousand years. Much good it would do you. She'd go out by a window rather than look at you. Put those stickers away or I'll blow your heads off!"

Sullenly, and glaring at each other with murderous hate, the men put their weapons away, while Meeson, pistol still in hand, glowered at them. It was evident that Meeson intended to rule until Randall recovered.

Denatti was first to leave the room, and he went out backward, smiling mockingly at Revella, who pretended to ignore him. There was a light in the hallway, and Denatti, after he had gone a dozen feet, looked back at the doorway as though fearful that he was being followed.

The Japanese was next to emerge. He went down the

dimly lighted hall to a rear stairway, and he too glanced fearfully behind him.

When Mortwell appeared he hesitated in the doorway and glanced both ways. Then, tip-toeing, he made his way westward, toward the stairway in that direction, glancing apprehensively at each door he passed, as if expecting a dreadful apparition to emerge. He had to descend to the big room to reach his sleeping quarters in the west wing of the house, and when the light from the bracket lamp in the big room shone upon him his face was pale and his eyes were wide with fright. He scuttered through the big room and into the next, where he took a candle from a shelf. His hands were trembling so that he had great difficulty in holding the sulphur match to the wick, and in the greenish-yellow light from the match his face was drawn and lined. He finally got the candle going and glided away in the darkness, reaching the stairs and going up them with a nervous and jerky motion that several times almost extinguished the blaze.

At the top of the stairs, in the hallway, he halted. The great, gloomy passageway was so black that the rays from his candle penetrated only a few feet, thereby intensifying the darkness beyond. It had been Mortwell who only this morning had discovered the dead Cree in the hallway. The body had been lying almost directly in front of Mortwell's door, and he had had to leap in order to avoid stepping on it, so dim was the daylight that filtered into the hallway through the open doorway of his room. He was now thinking of the Cree's body, and most horrible of all his recollections was the way the Indian's head had appeared. The Cree was

lying on his back, but his head had been twisted around until the back of it was uppermost. Mortwell had nearly screamed at the sight. And he was thinking of the Cree as he reached the door of his room and inserted the key into the lock. His back was toward the door as he fumbled with the key, and when the door swung open under his eager pushing he fairly leaped inside.

Goodhull did not go out until Meeson left Randall's room, and then he stepped only just outside the door and cringed against the wall until Meeson joined him. Meeson glanced at Goodhull and then up and down the hall.

"Where's the rest of the boys?" he asked.

"Revella and——"

"No. Killen and Atkins and Eccles. And Mortwell. Mortwell was just here. Where did he go?"

"To bed, I suppose."

Meeson laughed harshly.

"Hiding in their rooms, eh? Scared stiff by that neck-breaker. You go hunt up the others and bring them to my room. We're going to make a search for Underhill. We've got to move fast. Randall ain't going to get over this."

Goodhull's face blanched; he trembled and cringed under Meeson's derisive eye.

"You too!" Meeson said contemptuously. "What a brave, reckless gang of cutthroats you are! Scared of a damned Indian! Hell! Get out of here. I'll find them myself."

Meeson stepped past Goodhull and started down the hallway toward the stairs. Goodhull watched him an

instant, then fled in the opposite direction. As he ran down the hall he was drawing a key from a pocket. He opened a door and slipped into his room by the time Meeson reached the head of the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs Meeson took a candle from a shelf and held a match to it. He had derided the others, and yet, as he crossed the darkened room that adjoined the big room in which Randall had received the injury that would probably kill him, Meeson rested a hand on the butt of his pistol. And when he stepped into the big room his cheeks were white and his gaze furtive.

He did not linger in the big room, nor in the darkened room adjoining it on the west. And he went up the stairs casting rapid glances behind him. And the candle in his hand was jerking violently. He was as frightened as the others; his talk with Goodhull had been merely to reassure himself.

His room was to the right of the head of the stairs, and he lost no time reaching the door. He was inserting the key when he heard a shrill, high screech of terror which carried in it a wail of pitiable hopelessness and a consciousness of imminent doom. The screech died in a muffled gurgle that reverberated in wavering, sobbing cadences along the dark walls of the gloomy hallway. There was a short, shuddering silence, and then the sound of a body falling inert—which is like no other sound in the world. And Meeson stood there, candle in hand, staring down the hall. There came no other sound. It seemed to Meeson that there was nothing in the hallway—only blankness and an impenetrable darkness. And yet there was something. The weak yellow

beams of the candle blaze finally brought something into view. A shapeless bundle lying on the floor in front of Mortwell's door. An icy perspiration bathed Meeson. The candle in his hand shook violently, but he finally got the key into the lock of the door. He pushed the door open, jumped into the room, closed the door, dropped the inside fastenings into place, and stood there listening.

Chapter XXIII

THE paralysis of terror had also gripped Denise. She had retired early, and was asleep when the fearful scream had echoed through the hallway. She had jerked the covers over her head and in palpitating dread had cowered from a repetition of the sound. But she did not hear it again, and out of the confusion of her thought finally came the conviction that Wattanooka was again at work.

His victim this time had not been a Cree Indian. The shriek had come from the throat of a white man, and she was certain that the white man was Mortwell.

Lying in the bed, shuddering and trembling, loathing this house and all of its inhabitants, as she had loathed it from the day she had first begun to realize its character and the character of the man who owned it, she was on the verge of nervous hysteria. She wondered how she had endured it this long.

She had never visited the outside world. Lumly Randall had never permitted her out of his sight. She had been a prisoner. All that she knew of the outside world and its people was what she had been able to glean from a store of books that had been left here by her mother. Her dresses, the feminine treasures that filled her room, had all been brought to her by Randall's friends. The graceful mannerisms that she had mastered

had resulted from months of practice in front of the mirror in her room. It was there she had learned how to wear the clothes that had been brought to her; it was there that she bowed and smiled and flirted and pirouetted in an attempt to imitate the people of fact and fiction in her books. And it was in her room, too, that she had studied her books, seeking a medium with which to express her thoughts. To be sure, the men she met at the stone house were wicked and villainous, but in contact with them she had learned much also, especially about the world and its ways. She had learned about wickedness, too, through the amorous tales that had reached her ears. And she would have learned a great deal more had it not been for the watchful eye of Lumly Randall, who saw to it that certain gentlemen grew not too intimate with her. If she had had a wild strain in her she would have been lost, and so she knew that she had inherited her mother's character.

It was strange how these thoughts came to her at this moment. They were thoughts that were with her always, though—they were like a dark and dismal sea upon which she floated while she strove to reach the land where she would find honesty and stability and happiness. If it was Mortwell who had been killed she was sorry for him, as she had been sorry for the Cree whose neck Wattanooka had broken; but even her sorrow was a detached emotion. Mortwell and Randall and Meeson and Denatti and Revella and all the others did not belong to her world—the world she visioned.

Yet her terror persisted. And after a while she got up, lit a candle, and sat in a chair with her night robe around her, wondering and listening. She got out of the chair

after a while, unfastened the door to the adjoining room, and with the candle in hand peered into it.

She knew Fallon was not there—she had not heard him. Fallon and Wattanooka were searching the house for Underhill, and she was certain that Mortwell—or whoever it was who had screamed—had unfortunately come upon Wattanooka in one of the rooms.

She went back to bed, to sleep fitfully until daybreak. And shortly afterward she heard subdued voices in the hallway, footsteps on the stone floor. And then, later, having taken time to compose herself, she went down to breakfast, not waiting for Mowaki to bring it to her, for she was curious about the identity of the man who had screamed during the night.

She found Meeson and Denatti and Revella and Goodhull in the big room.

They had breakfasted and the dishes had not yet been removed. The big front door was open, letting in a flood of bright sunlight and a cool, frost-laden breeze.

Denatti was standing in front of the fireplace, smoking. One side of his face bore a black and blue bruise, but he was still the beau and the dandy, immaculate and sartorially correct in his conception of the habiliments of the swashbuckling gentleman. He smiled and bowed and threw a mocking glance at Revella, who had been gazing out of the door when Denise appeared, and was now facing the girl and holding himself as rigid as the barrel of a musket.

Goodhull sat in a chair near the door. He was leaning forward with his elbows resting on his knees and his cupped hands supporting his chin. He did not look around when Denise entered the room.

Meeson was sitting at the big table. His elbows were on its top. His chin, also, was in his cupped hands. Meeson stared at Denise without speaking.

Mowaki entered and spoke to Denise as she seated herself at the table. Then the Jap went out.

Denise sensed a tension in the room, and she knew the reason for it. This third killing had affected the men. Their nerves were on edge. They could hold the outward appearance of gentlemen when their fortunes were surging high, but in adversity they became savages. Denise did not look at Meeson, though she was aware that Meeson was narrowly watching her. She knew that Meeson had never liked her. His treatment of her had been the gruff courtesy of a grudging and enforced politeness. Now that Randall was not able to impose his will upon these men they would be different.

"Well, Miss Laville, did you sleep well last night?" said Meeson. His gaze was level.

"I was awakened once."

"Ah! You were awakened once. And do you know what awakened you?"

"A shriek, a scream; the cry of a man in terrible agony."

"And did you investigate?"

"No, indeed. I was too frightened. Besides, I knew there were men in the house to attend to such things."

Denatti laughed.

"Quite right. There were men in the house but they did not attend. Meeson, for one."

Meeson glared.

"Denatti, you talk too much."

"You could not expect Mademoiselle Denise to investigate the cry when you yourself did not investigate until dawn."

Meeson's jaws tightened.

"Don't drive me too far, Denatti!" he warned.

"Denatti will always demand courtesy to the ladies."

"Bah! What would have happened to this particular lady if it had not been that Lumly Randall had warned you?"

Revella laughed unpleasantly.

"Mademoiselle Laville is not interested in Denatti, Meeson," he said.

Denatti darted a malignant glance at his rival, but bowed to Denise.

"Mademoiselle does not permit Revella to speak for her," he answered.

Meeson half rose from his chair and glared at the two men. He seemed on the point of hurling himself upon Denatti. But he restrained himself, probably observing that Denatti's hand had strayed toward his sword hilt. Meeson reddened, paled, sat down again.

"Don't forget what I told you last night," he said. "Mademoiselle Laville wants neither of you, and won't have you. If I mistake not there are other fish in the sea. Fallon, for example. Eh, mademoiselle?"

"Do you mean the gentleman who said he was Lumly Randall's guest?" asked Denise calmly.

"None other. I have not seen him. But I understand he is handsome enough to be a favorite with the ladies. And he was certainly man enough to break Denatti's sword and knock his face half off. Denatti has another

sword, but his face will not be replaced so quickly." He grinned maliciously at Denatti's frown, and went on before Denatti could speak:

"Fallon, mademoiselle. Where is Fallon? You took Fallon out of this room after he knocked the devil out of Denatti. What did you do with him? Where did you take him?"

"I took him nowhere, sir. I went immediately to my room."

"Be careful, mademoiselle! Lumly Randall is not here to protect you."

"I am not afraid, Meeson."

Meeson's face paled with fury.

"That's just like you, mademoiselle. Independent. Contemptuous. Disdainful. You do not concern yourself with us. You are above us. You don't speak to us if you can avoid it. You are a sort of sacred flower. Why, if I told you what I know about——"

Denise stood up, facing him.

"Save your breath, Meeson," she said. "Lumly Randall has told me what you are so eager to say. My mother was a captive on the *Terror*. My father and some other men drew lots for my mother, and my father won her. Well, what of that? Do you dare to say that she was not faithful to my father?"

Meeson stared at her. He evidently had not known that the facts of her parentage had been communicated to her by Randall. But he hated her, and as he could not longer attack her from that direction he attacked from another.

"I am asking you about Fallon, mademoiselle. Where is he? Did you take him to your room?"

Denise looked past Meeson. Mowaki was standing in a distant doorway with a tray of dishes. And Denise spoke to him.

"Mowaki," she said, "please bring my breakfast."

She turned, passed Denatti without looking at him, and walked out of the room.

Mowaki followed her, bearing the tray and the dishes. Meeson stepped forward as if to restrain Denise, but a look at Denatti dissuaded him. He sat down, cursing.

"Damn me! I swear that if she stays here long enough I will throw her to the swine!" He glared at Denatti. "Swine like you and Revella!" he added.

Denatti laughed.

"That cannot happen too soon, Meeson."

But from the look that Meeson gave Denatti it was apparent that when the time came it would be Revella and not Denatti to whom the pearl would be cast.

Chapter XXIV

MORTWELL had brought his death upon himself. For when he had entered his room with the candle in front of him, and had stood with his back against the closed door, the candlelight had revealed to him the giant figure of a half-naked Indian. The Indian was Wattanooka. He had climbed out of the shaft in the fireplace only an instant before Mortwell entered the room. He had extinguished the pine torch he had carried, and was about to descend the shaft when he heard Mortwell at the door. He caught Mortwell's wild, amazed gaze, saw Mortwell draw a knife. He leaped. The candle dropped as Mortwell lunged with the knife. The long blade flashed in the dying candlelight and Mortwell's wrist was gripped and twisted. The knife dropped, striking Mortwell's leg and landing on the tip of the handle, with little sound. Mortwell wrestled and struck viciously with his fists. When he felt an arm go around his neck, felt the iron muscles begin to tighten, he knew what impended and he emitted the shriek that had palsied Meeson.

After tossing Mortwell's body into the hall, Wattanooka closed the door and barred it. He picked up the torch, let himself into the shaft, slid the hearthstone into place, and descended. He and Fallon were searching all the rooms for Underhill—Fallon utilizing the shafts on one side of the subterranean passage, Wattanooka

those on the other side. Wattanooka so far had been in three rooms and had found them all unoccupied except Mortwell's. He entered a half-dozen others before he joined Fallon in the passage below.

In the light from the pine torches the Indian's face had the cold hardness of the stoic, and yet his eyes were gleaming with a strange fire.

"No find um yet?" he questioned. "Ugh. Me no find um, too. Find other man—think Mortwell. Killum. Put um in hall. Revella find um—mebbe. Revella know Wattanooka here. Sometime Wattanooka find Revella in room. Bust um face."

"Mortwell, eh?" said Fallon. His face was grim. He stood in the glare of the firebrands, the soot from the smoke flecking his cheeks. His hair was in wild disorder; he was covered from head to foot with cobwebs and dust. Standing together, the red man and the white, with the black smoke from the torches swirling and eddying around them and the ragged rock walls and roof of the subterranean passage closing them in, they made a picture of primitive force and strength that might have interested even the Roman gladiators. The picture might have interested Revella. For it was upon Revella that the Indian's thoughts were centered as he stood there with Fallon. For it had been Revella who had driven a knife into Wattanooka's side that day at Big Tree Portage, and it had been Revella who had helped to inflict the torture upon Adam Hammond, whom Wattanooka had loved. And now it was Revella again.

Revella was not found that night. Nor Underhill. When the dawn broke the two men were at the tunnel entrance breathing the air of the outside world. And

before the sun rose they had closed the mouth of the tunnel and were far southward, in the forest, asleep in a shelter they had erected. For Wattanooka would not sleep in the house, and Fallon was glad to get away from its damp walls, its gloomy atmosphere.

But when darkness came again they resumed their search for Underhill. They were unsuccessful that night and the following night, although they searched all the rooms and the towers. The search of the rooms they conducted in the first hours of the night, while the occupants were absent. The remainder of the night they devoted to a careful scrutiny of the walls of the tunnel and of the various other tunnels that intersected the main tunnel. And after a dozen nights had passed in this fashion Fallon returned to the room that Denise had given him.

He made no sound as he swung himself out of the shaft, for he did not want Denise to know that he had returned. He was in no mood to talk with her, to endure looking upon her loveliness when he knew she was not for him. He was not a man to pursue women or to force himself upon them. He was not adept at love making. When he had told her that she was his woman he had meant that she was the only woman he had ever loved.

He was after the pack that he had left lying on the floor of the big room on the night Lumly Randall had opened the door for him. He did not know where he might find it, but he meant to get it. For soon, if he did not find Lin Underhill, he would leave the house, to search for him in the surrounding forests. For he was beginning to entertain a conviction that Randall had taken Underhill away.

Wattanooka was in the tunnel, searching. Wattanooka did not believe that Underhill had been taken away. Each time that Fallon had suggested the possibility, the Indian had vigorously disagreed.

Fallon did not replace the hearthstone, for he intended to return this way after finding his pack. His moccasined feet made no sound as he moved to the hall door, lifted the fastenings, opened the door, and stepped out into the hallway.

There was no light. Merely blackness. Fallon guided himself to the stairway by feeling his way along the stone wall. There was no light downstairs, and he went down the stairway and into the room where he had first seen Denise by cautiously sidling along the walls and through the doorways. When he reached the door that led into the big room he paused and listened. There was no sound anywhere, and so he felt his way along the wall to a point near the front door. There, near the wall, on the floor, he came upon the pack. He ran his hands over it to identify it. No one had disturbed it. The rifle was still under the straps. He swung it to his shoulders, slipped his arms through the straps, and began the return trip. He made the trip without incident, and after he let himself into the door of the room Denise had given him he noiselessly placed the pack on the floor near the shaft and prepared to go down.

The pack was awkward to handle. He intended to lower it into the shaft and work it down ahead of him. But the barrel of the rifle somehow got crosswise and struck an edge of stone, creating a sharp rasping sound. It was the first noise he had made and it brought an

instant response. For the door leading to Denise's room slowly opened. First a candle, and then Denise's head and face and shoulders, appeared. Fallon got an impression that she had been standing at the door, listening. Perhaps, previously, he had made a sound that had awakened her. Or perhaps she had not yet gone to bed. It did not matter—she was here.

Her eyes were big and bright, and a bit resentful, as she stepped into the room. The flame of the candle in her hand disclosed Fallon kneeling at the edge of the shaft, his face and body covered with cobwebs and dust. His .45 Colt had leaped into his right hand at the sound of the door being opened. He shoved the weapon back into its holster, rested the pack on the floor, and got to his feet to face her.

She was dressed in garments that made her look like a boy. Knee-length trousers, a mackinaw coat, a cap, leggings, moccasins, woolen shirt. Sight of her again did something to Fallon—swelled his lungs, sent a sharp pang of longing through him.

Her gaze rested first upon Fallon and then upon the pack, with the rifle sticking between the straps. Her eyes widened a little, then narrowed with mockery.

"Ah. So Monsieur Fallon is leaving us?" she whispered. "Is Lin Underhill found?"

"He isn't in the house," answered Fallon. "We think he is hidden somewhere in the forest."

She shook her head.

"I do not know where he is, Monsieur Fallon," she said. "I thought you and Wattanooka had gone," she added. There was reproach in her eyes.

"We shall not go until we have found Lin Under-

hill. And when we go you may go with us, if you care to."

"I think I shall go when you go, monsieur. Oh, this terrible, terrible house!"

"What has happened, ma'am?"

"Nothing yet, Monsieur Fallon. It is what may happen. I know there have been murders committed here. It has been terrible. All these years I have pretended to know nothing about them. I have shut sights and sounds from my senses so that I would not know what has been going on. I have told myself that I have been mistaken. Monsieur, nearly every night I go to sleep with my head under the covers. But while Lumly Randall was able to be around I had no fears for myself. Now I do not know what is going to happen. Revella is growing bolder. Denatti follows me. Meeson looks at me so strangely. And, Monsieur Fallon, you have not been in your room for twelve nights."

Fallon's blood surged mightily. She had noticed his absence from the room she had given him. However, that probably meant very little. She could wish him to be near her in the rôle of protector, merely. He frowned.

"I shall sleep in the room hereafter," he told her.

She seemed relieved. She smiled.

Fallon was amazed at the sudden change in her. Her manner was no longer doubtful or reproachful. The troubled light had gone from her eyes. Fallon caught a flash from them that made him tremble for an instant, so that he had to clench his hands to keep from taking her in his arms.

"Why are you dressed like that?" he asked gruffly, to keep her from discovering his passion.

"I had got ready to search for Monsieur Fallon," she declared.

"Why?" he asked.

"To see if he had found Underhill," she said.

"You were going to descend to the tunnel?"

"Why, yes; of course. Underhill is not in any of the rooms, so therefore he must be under the house."

"You'd better go back to bed," he told her.

She smiled at him with tantalizing calmness.

"Monsieur," she said, "is that the way you are going to speak to your wife—if you get one?"

"I shall never have a wife."

"Then you will be very lonely, Monsieur Fallon."

He did not answer; he was again lowering the pack. He dropped it a little distance and then found the rungs of the ladder and descended until only his head and shoulders were in the room.

Denise was watching him smilingly.

"You are going down, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And you are coming back for me?"

"No."

"Then I am going to follow you down."

"You will not."

"I will! I should have gone if you had not come to-night, Monsieur Fallon."

"You are obstinate—like all women."

"Ah. I presume Monsieur Fallon knows a great deal about women?"

"A little. Enough to perceive that you are going to dominate the man you marry."

"The man I marry will do things for me cheerfully, monsieur."

Fallon sighed. One thing was certain—he would not be the man she would marry. She would not be mocking him if she was giving him serious consideration.

"Well," he said, "come on, if you are determined. I will go down with the pack and will wait in the tunnel until you join me. Then I will come back and replace the hearthstone."

Fallon went down. When he reached the bottom he set the pack down at a little distance from the foot of the ladder, lighted a pine torch, and held it above his head to light Denise's way. She came down lightly and rapidly, and in a moment was standing beside him. Her eyes were wide with wonder, but she gave Fallon a dazzling smile that brought another to his lips.

"That is so much better, monsieur."

"What is better?"

"To see you smile. You are very handsome when you smile."

Flattery and raillery, banter and mockery.

"Look here," he said. "If I amuse you I can't help it. I'm trying not to. I'm what I am. You've shown me that I've nothing to hope for from you. Why not let it go at that?"

"Ah, monsieur, you are so very original," she returned. She was provokingly serene. She had eyes like a Madonna. They were full of knowledge and soft with the mystic glow of the possessor of secrets unknown to others.

Fallon abruptly began to climb the ladder. He had

stuck the torch into a crevice in the rock floor of the tunnel. He went up, slid the hearthstone into place, and descended again, to find Denise fearfully watching Wattanooka, who stood a short distance away, his big belt-ax in hand.

Denise's face was pale; it was evident she thought the Indian an enemy. For Wattanooka stood, grim and silent, and stared at her. But when he saw Fallon emerge from the shaft his eyes gleamed with interest and friendliness.

"Ugh," he said. "White woman."

"Wattanooka, this is Denise Laville," said Fallon.

Denise moved forward to the red giant and silently held out her right hand to him. Wattanooka stared incredulously, then took the hand, gripped it, seemed to marvel at it.

"How," he said.

He looked at Fallon. His black eyes were inscrutable.

"Your woman?" he asked.

These were almost Fallon's words, spoken to Denise nearly two weeks before. Fallon reddened.

"No," he answered.

"You fool," declared Wattanooka.

Fallon turned away, not caring to meet Denise's gaze at that moment.

However, Wattanooka met it. And what Wattanooka saw in the girl's eyes caused his own to twinkle with sympathy and understanding and secret satisfaction.

Chapter XXV

WHILE Wattanooka and Fallon and Denise were searching the underground passages, Meeson and Revella were in Randall's room. Denatti and the others had gone out only a few minutes before, and Meeson had closed the door after them, and locked it. Then for a few minutes he stood at one of the windows of the room, peering out into the darkness. A new moon was swimming low over the eastern horizon, and sections of the dark forest were disclosed to Meeson. After a time he went to the bed, where he stood, watching the sick man.

Randall's face was flushed. There were great blue veins in his forehead that, seemingly, were on the point of bursting. His one eye was wide open. It was not the eye of sanity, for it was wild and uncomprehending. It quested here and there as if in search of something that was not to be found. It glared at Meeson and Revella with no recognition, but with a dazed, insensate light. It was expressing passion which could not be concentrated or directed; it reflected the confused and chaotic thoughts of a brain that was no longer capable of separating fact from fantasy.

Randall's huge body was in constant motion. His legs and arms were jerking. His great head, still bandaged, rolled from side to side, and his chest heaved as he fought for breath.

Meeson watched him calmly, with steady malice; but Revella could not be motionless for an instant. He walked back and forth in the room, always keeping his gaze upon Randall, as if expecting him to leap from the bed.

And it seemed that such a determination was in Randall's mind.

But if Meeson feared that Randall would get out of bed he gave no sign. His interest in Randall appeared to be professional, except for the malice in his gaze.

"There's no hope, Revella," he said over his shoulder. "Randall is through. We are going to have a crazy man on our hands."

"Hell!" exclaimed Revella.

"I expect paralysis, too," continued Meeson. "He won't be able to move. That means we'll have to wait on him. I'll be damned if I'll do it. I'm going to give him a shot of strychnine."

"That won't do, Meeson. We've got to keep him alive if we want to find Underhill."

"Underhill has starved to death by this time. It's been over two weeks since Randall got his head broke." Meeson looked at Revella and there was a wild, furtive glare in his eyes. "I'm going to get away from this damned house!" he declared. "That big Indian is here. The doors and windows are locked every night, but still he gets in. He was in Mortwell's room. Mortwell was in his room when he yelled that night. He was dumped into the hall from his own door. And the next morning we find the door locked from the inside. I'm getting the creeps. I don't sleep any more. I'm getting jumpy. Blazes! Think of waking up some night and

seeing that red devil bending over you! Think of opening the door of your room and seeing him standing close to you!

"The Crees are ready to stampede. They won't leave their camp at night. They huddle around their fires and wail their death song. They say Wattanooka has the strength of a dozen men and that he has sworn to kill every Cree he sets his eyes on. The Crees killed his brother. That would be all right if he stopped at Crees. But Mortwell wasn't a Cree, Revella. He was a white man."

Revella laughed cynically, but his face was pale.

"Bah!" he exclaimed. "You're like the Crees, Meeson. Because there was the mark of a moccasin on the neck of the Cree I sent up there to get into Denise's spare room you think Wattanooka killed him. The Crees say that is Wattanooka's mark, all right, but after what we did to Wattanooka at Big Tree I doubt if he could break a child's neck. We took a lot of the strength out of him there, Meeson. Wattanooka isn't here. It's Fallon. And there's nothing mysterious about him being in the house. He's a good-looking man and Denise has appropriated him. She had him hid somewhere."

"The hussy! She'd do that. But it don't sound reasonable, Revella. Fallon told Randall that Blandin had sent him here. Sure, Randall tried to kill Fallon, but would that supply a reason for Fallon killing Mortwell? No. Fallon got out that same night, I believe. He was so scared he left his pack and rifle. On the other hand, Wattanooka has a reason for killing. He knows Randall was back of the torturing of Adam Hammond."

"You swallowed Fallon's story, eh?—that Blandin

sent him. Well, I don't. And Randall didn't swallow it. I've talked to Mowaki. He was watching Fallon and Randall that night—the night Randall was hurt. Randall got Fallon to turn his back for a second. Then Randall heaved a knife at him. Randall was sitting at the table and Fallon was standing in front of the fireplace. The knife missed Fallon, and he jumped over the table and landed with both feet on Randall's chest. Now what happened before Randall threw the knife? Simple, Meeson. Randall discovered that Fallon was an impostor."

"Why didn't Mowaki tell us this before?" roared Meeson.

Revella grinned crookedly.

"He was told not to tell, I suppose. Denise took Fallon with her that night, after Randall went down. Mowaki saw them go. She took him to her room. When I went up soon after, to talk to Denise, Mowaki was coming down. He'd followed Denise and Fallon and saw them go into her room. He didn't tell me then. It was only yesterday that I got it out of him."

"Who told him not to tell?"

"Denise. She told him that Fallon had gone."

Meeson's face purpled.

"Damn Mowaki!" he almost shouted. "I'll tear him apart!"

Meeson's rage was great, and yet he seemed relieved. The news that Fallon had gone was welcome. He was glad that there was no foundation for his fears that Wattanooka was in the house.

His rage now took a new turn. It centered upon Denise. Denise had harbored Fallon. He had never

liked her. He had resented her presence in the stone house. And now she had betrayed them all.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "I'll fix her! I'll choke her lying tongue out!"

Behind Meeson, Randall was in the grip of a mighty passion. His breath was coming with a shrill, rasping sound, his solitary eye was rolling so that only the white was visible; his muscles were heaving and straining and his arms were beating the quilts. He was striving to get out of the bed. He was muttering unintelligibly.

Revella peered at him. Revella's face blanched; he smirked and stepped in front of Meeson so that he could not been seen by Randall's eye.

"Does that big swab hear us?" he asked.

Meeson looked over his shoulder at Randall. There was amazement in his glance. But he spoke contemptuously.

"There's more life in him than I thought. Yes, I think he understands. Little good it will do him."

A new mood seized Meeson. The malice that had been expressed in his manner toward Randall now manifested itself. He went to the bed, sat upon its edge, gripped Randall's arms, and held them down while he whispered into the stricken man's ear:

"Listen, Randall. You've bullied me for thirty-five years. You've cheated me out of more than one share of what belonged to me. I've got you now where I can get even with you. Do you know what I am going to do? Do you know what I am going to do? Denise. Do you understand? Denise Laville. The girl you've taken such good care of. The girl you have protected. The girl you have always claimed is descended from a royal line. The

daughter of a nobleman's daughter! Do you know what I am going to do with her? I am going to turn her over to Revella. Revella! Do you understand? Revella—ha, ha, ha! Revella is going to take her to his cabin up north! Now, damn you, think of that! You understand, eh?"

A white froth appeared upon Randall's lips; his mouth was working soundlessly, and his huge and flaccid jowls were agitated by the jerking of the neck cords under them. His eye had ceased rolling; it glared fixedly, with hideous malignance, with deadly hate and fury, at Meeson.

"He's going to get up!"

There was a ring of terror in Revella's voice. He darted to the hall door, and stood there with a hand upon the latch, ready to escape from the room.

Meeson laughed.

"Take it easy, Revella. He won't get up. He's crazy, but I think he understood what I said to him. Partly, anyhow. Don't worry about him getting up. He's paralyzed. The nerve centers. Now that he knows what is going to happen to Denise we'll let him alone for two or three days to think it over. Nice prospect for him, eh?"

Meeson stood grinning broadly at Randall. And Randall, lying perfectly still, glared back at him. After a while, when it appeared that Meeson's mirth was appeased, he abruptly turned to the door and went out of the room, Revella following him.

They went downstairs to the big room, lit a candle, and seated themselves at the big table before a stone flagon of wine and glasses. For a while they talked and

drank, and then Meeson drew out a pocket medicine case and selected a phial which he passed over to Revella.

"Dope," he said. "There's just enough in there to knock her out for twenty-four hours. I don't know how you are going to get her to take it. That's your affair. A light wine will disguise the taste; or coffee, or any strongly flavored liquid or food. Don't be in too big a hurry. Don't try to take her out of the house in the daytime. To-morrow night, maybe. So the Crees won't see you. They're crazy about her, you know, and they'd likely interfere. How are you going to get her up there?"

"Canoe. There's only one portage—a short one."

"You'll marry her, eh?" suggested Meeson.

"No man will take her without marriage, Meeson. She'd kill herself. I'll be glad to marry her. I've wanted to, but she wouldn't have me. She'll have to marry me when I get her up there. I'll send to the factor at Churchill."

"I don't care what you do with her," declared Meeson. "You can take her up the river and drown her." A new thought struck him and he glared at Revella. "I wonder if she knows where Underhill is?"

Revella shook his head with a quick negative.

"Hell, no. She'd have been feeding him. I've watched her. She hasn't left her room in a week."

"Well, get her out of here before that gang from the coast gets here. They ought to be here to-morrow. Blandin, too. If you get her out of the house before Blandin gets here I'll tell him Randall sent her to the coast, to ship out. The news will please that big slob, too. He's wild about her."

Revella's teeth gleamed. He got up, stretched himself, looked at Meeson. His eyes were glittering with eagerness.

"I'm going to bed," he said. His gaze swept the room. He started, stood rigid, stared. His voice caught in his throat, then burst out hoarsely:

"Fallon's pack! It's gone! I saw it there to-night, Meeson. Fallon is still in the house!"

Meeson had jerked abruptly around to face the corner where the pack had been. His face whitened; he leaned against the table as if for support. His breath came shrilly.

After a while, when the shock had passed, Meeson spoke:

"You were right, Revella; she's hiding him. In her room."

Revella's face flamed with sudden passion. He drew a long knife from a sheath at his belt, under his coat, and without glancing again at Meeson went through the west door, which would take him up the stairs and into the hallway that led to Denise's room.

And Meeson, after watching Revella go through the west door, got up, smiled slyly, and went through the east door to the stairs that led up to Randall's room. Meeson paused at the door and listened. A low moaning greeted him—the sound of a man in mortal agony; a strange whining and mewling; a gibbering voice that begged and pled and cursed.

Chapter XXVI

REVELLA, listening at Denise's door in the hallway upstairs, heard no sound from the room. Jealousy, aroused by Meeson's reference to Fallon, had driven Revella to his action in spying upon Denise, but his vigil outside the door brought him no satisfaction. He could not even hear Denise breathing, and therefore he concluded she was in a soundless sleep. Nor did Revella hear any sounds through the door next to Denise's—the door of the spare room.

He had told Meeson that Wattanooka was not in the house, but through the long hours from the time he reached the hallway until daylight began to filter into the gloomy corridor, Revella was bathed in an icy perspiration. Every slight sound startled him; the blackness that surrounded him was filled with frightful images that leered at him. With his long knife clutched tightly in his hand, he waited and listened; and several times he was certain he could dimly see Wattanooka's giant figure taking shape in the shadows. He was afraid, and yet his passion sustained him. At dawn, though, he silently stole away and went to his room in the east wing.

Not more than half an hour later the hearthstone of the fireplace in the room adjoining Denise's slowly lifted. It was slid back and Fallon's head and shoulders appeared in the opening. He swung himself lightly up-

ward, then reached a hand down and helped Denise out of the shaft. Fallon's face was grim and dirty, but in some miraculous manner Denise had escaped both dust and grimness. For after Fallon helped her from the shaft she stood looking at him, her fair skin white and flawless, her eyes half smiling at him.

"That was a wonderful adventure, Monsieur Fallon," she declared.

"Failure again."

"Yes. But it is not your fault. You have tried. You will keep on trying until you find him."

"Of course. That's what I'm here for. Lin's father is depending upon me."

"Gail Hammond is depending upon you too, monsieur. Do you remember when you left Wattanooka and myself in the main tunnel while you went to inspect another? Well, while you were gone Wattanooka told me about Gail. She must be a beautiful girl."

"She is."

"She loves Lin Underhill."

"So she says."

"Did you talk with her—much, monsieur?"

"Quite a bit. She was in my shelter with me one night. She told me about her father; about this house; about Lumly Randall; about herself and her mother."

"That must have taken a long time."

"Quite a long time."

Fallon tried to look at Denise's eyes, but could not, for she did not lift them to his. He could not believe that jealousy was prompting her questions. It must be that she was merely bantering again.

"Is she very beautiful, monsieur?"

"She is one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."

"Did you fall in love with her, Monsieur Jim?"

"No."

"Why? You like beautiful women."

"Look here," he said gruffly; "I don't fall in love with every good-looking woman I see."

She suddenly looked up at him and smiled. Then she turned from him and peered into her room. She shivered and turned to face him again. Her face was serious.

"You will sleep here?" she asked.

"No. I'm going into the timber with Wattanooka. We are going to search outside for Underhill."

She shivered again.

"You will come back again, to-night? I am afraid, monsieur. I have a strange feeling—a fear. I do not know what it is."

"I'll leave the hearthstone off. Keep the hall door locked. Sleep. Don't open the doors. I'll be back here before dark. If anybody tries to force the door, go down the shaft and through the big tunnel toward the river."

She entered her room, smiling at Fallon.

Fallon descended the shaft, leaving the hearthstone off as he had promised.

Denise went to bed.

She slept fitfully, restlessly. But at last she must have fallen into a deep slumber, for she heard nothing until she was awakened by a step in the hall. She sat up and observed that the sun was in the west. She got up, dressed, and went to a window. She saw Denatti getting into a canoe at the little wharf. He did not see her, and she watched him seat himself, push off, and begin to

paddle down the stream toward the Cree village. From the window she had a good view of the village, and she was certain she saw Goodhull there, and Eccles, and the other men—Atkins and Killen. They often visited the village, and she supposed Denatti was going there too.

The step she heard must have been Meeson's. He'd been to his room, she supposed, which was to the right of the head of the stairs. She made up her bed. Then she dropped into a chair and sat there, listening. She was afraid to go downstairs for food. She wasn't hungry, anyway, for in the tunnel during the night Wattanooka had produced food that he had appropriated from the kitchen. He did not tell her how he had obtained it, but his eyes had glinted with satisfaction when she had taken some of it.

Presently she again heard footsteps. They came up the stairs, down the hall. There was no stealth in them; the sound they made was clear and sharp. She expected them to go down the hall, but they stopped at her door.

A sharp knock, that somehow expressed a demand. Then a voice—Revella's.

"Denise!" he called. "Come! Hurry!"

Startled, she ran to the door and called through it: "What is it, please?"

"Denise, it's Randall. He's in bad shape. He's going to die. He's calling for you. I think he's got something to say to you. Hurry!"

Ah! It had come at last. He wanted to tell her about her mother, as he had been promising to do for years. Swiftly she unfastened the door and stepped into the hall, leaving the door partly open. Revella was waiting

for her. The light in the hall was dim and she could not see Revella's face clearly. In fact she had no opportunity, for when Revella saw her he turned quickly and began to walk down the hall toward the stairs.

She followed him down. They went through the lower rooms, crossed the big room. The door of the big room was open, and through it she saw that the sun was low; that its rays, turning golden, were tinting the leaves of the trees.

She followed Revella up the stairs of the east wing and stood beside him as he opened the door of Randall's room. Once inside she had no interest in Revella, for she knew from Randall's appearance that a crisis had come.

He was lying flat on his back. His legs and arms were jerking with spasmodic motions, and he was muttering as his head turned from side to side.

Denise saw the froth on his lips; the purple veins on his forehead that seemed ready to burst; his solitary eye, which was rolling wildly. The sight appalled her. Her face blanched, she swayed and held tightly to one of the bedposts.

And then Revella was at her side, offering her a small glass filled with a dark liquid.

"It is terrible, Denise. I did not want to call you, but he insisted. Drink this wine. It will fortify you for what is to come."

She took the glass from Revella, drank half its contents. It seemed at first to stimulate her. But as she stood there it seemed that the room began to whirl slowly. The bed appeared to recede; a strange nausea oppressed her. She felt Revella's arms slip around her; she saw Revella's face close to hers. She struggled a little.

Chapter XXVII

STANDING there, holding the unconscious girl in his arms, Revella grinned into Randall's eye, which had ceased rolling. The eye was opened so wide that it appeared about to pop out of its socket. It glared with hate unutterable, with comprehension.

Revella swung Denise into his arms and carried her to the door. She was a limp burden and not heavy, so Revella had no difficulty in unfastening the door and opening it. He did not bother to lock it, but as he stepped out into the hall he glanced up and down to see if he was observed. He had chosen the time well. There was no one in the house except Randall, Meeson, Denise, and himself. Meeson had gone to his room. Meeson was through. He was getting ready to leave the house. He was going to take an Indian guide and go to Churchill, where he would wait for a ship to take him back to civilization. But before he left he meant to administer strychnine to Randall.

Randall was helpless, Meeson was in his room, and so therefore there was no one to spy upon Revella. There was plenty of time. Dusk had not yet come but he could carry Denise through a rear door, keeping the house between him and the Cree village until he reached the canoe which he had concealed in some willows a little distance up the river. In the canoe were supplies that would last until he reached his cabin.

When he reached the big room Revella paused in the

doorway. He had forgotten his sheath knife—a long-bladed weapon which he wore suspended from a belt around his waist. It was in his room, and he would have to return for it. He could get it and return to the room while he could count a hundred.

He thought first of taking Denise with him but decided to leave her in the big room. He looked at the great, brass-bound sea chest that stood against the east wall, but chose the table and gently placed Denise upon it. Then he ran through the east doorway and up the stairs to his room, which was at the farther end of the hallway. He got the knife, quickly strapped the belt around his waist, and ran down the stairs. But at the door of the big room he stopped short and stood with his hands against the jambs, staring in consternation.

Standing beside the table, close to Denise, was Denatti.

His muscles rigid, every nerve jumping, Revella's senses grasped several things quickly. The front door had been open. Now it was closed. The fastenings were not in place; the door might be opened from the outside. Denatti was armed. His sword was at his side. Twilight had come; the sun had gone down. Denise had not stirred. Her right hand, white and shapely, was dangling over the edge of the table, the wrist partly hidden by some filmy white lace at the end of the black sleeve of her dress. Denatti knew what was happening. His face was pale, his lips were in straight lines except for a slight curve of contempt at one of the corners; his eyes were cold, hard, and agleam with hate.

"So this is why you got the canoe ready?" he said. "I was wondering."

Revella did not answer. There was no need. He and Denatti understood each other. The clash which was now imminent had been impending. Each had known it. The trouble was that Revella now realized that he was at a disadvantage. He had not expected interference from Denatti; he had seen Denatti paddling down the river and had thought he intended visiting the Cree village. So he had taken his rifle and pistol to the canoe, so that he would not be hampered with them while carrying Denise. He had been so eager to get away that he had almost forgotten his knife.

The knife had a long blade, but Denatti's sword had a longer one. And Denatti knew how to use a sword. Moreover, Denatti apparently was aware of the fact that his rival's only weapon was a knife, for he laughed derisively.

"No gun, eh?" he said. He moved away from the table, stepping cautiously backward, keeping one hand on the table edge as if to aid him to leave quickly should such an action be necessary. And as he moved he watched Revella's right hand. For Revella, who was now crouching, had drawn the big knife, and was balancing it in a strange fashion as he followed Denatti.

Denatti, backing away, drew his sword. He knew that Revella was a knife-thrower; that he was amazingly swift and accurate with the weapon. Revella needed only an instant, hardly more than the time that would be consumed in flickering an eyelash, to send the knife flashing to its mark. That was why Denatti was feeling his way along the table. He dared not permit his gaze to wander for the merest fraction of a second.

Denatti knew that if he could draw his enemy to close

quarters he would win swiftly, and so his aim was to circle out into the room, away from the table, where a sudden lunge would finish Revella. But Revella, intent upon throwing the knife, had no intention of doing as Denatti wished. He followed Denatti around the table, past the end and down the side nearest the fireplace, alert for a momentary lapse of watchfulness, or an accident that would bring him the opportunity he sought. There were several chairs along the sides of the table. Some of them had been pushed under so that only their backs were visible, but others were in various positions; and all of them presented hazards for Denatti. If he stumbled against one of them, or backed against one in such a position as to prevent his moving quickly, or if he so much as glanced down at one of them, Revella would have him.

But Denatti was cool and careful. He moved backward very slowly, always watching Revella's right hand. Some prescience seemed to warn him of the position of the chairs behind him, for not once down the entire length of the table did he hesitate. Nor did he back into one of the chairs. Nor did he glance for an instant at Denise as he passed her. Revella had waited for that, but it did not happen.

When Denatti reached the east end of the table he swung widely outward until one of the great stone columns supporting the second story was between him and his enemy. Then he laughed.

The laugh goaded Revella. Denatti had anticipated that. Revella came closer, yet not close enough to permit Denatti to make the fatal lunge. But as Revella moved forward Denatti stepped out from behind the

stone pillar and edged toward him, his right side foremost, the blade in his hand weaving and circling.

And now it was Revella that sought distance. He backed as Denatti advanced, and the latter mocked him. Yet Denatti was watchful. He knew what Revella could do with a knife. Denatti did not, dared not, rush. He continued to follow Revella. Around the room they went, and then along the side of the table, until they were about where they had been when they started, except that their positions were reversed. And at the end of the table Revella backed against a chair. In moving away from it he upset it. It crashed to the floor as Denatti leaped and lunged. Denatti had misjudged the distance, or Revella, anticipating the thrust, slid back to evade it. The point of the sword vainly stabbed the air two or three feet from Revella's chest. The knife flashed from Revella's side, so quickly that there was only a glittering line for the eye to follow.

Denatti felt the wind from it. He may have thought it had struck him. He may have been momentarily paralyzed by the suddenness of the movement and his escape. For he stood motionless, his lips parted. The knife went forward and upward. It struck the ceiling, rang against the beams, and fell with a clang to the stone floor. Before it struck the men were locked in each other's arms, fighting for the sword that was still in Denatti's hand.

Revella, slender though he was, was the stronger. He had gripped Denatti's sword arm with his left hand; his right arm was around Denatti's waist as he drove furiously forward, trying to back his enemy against the table edge near where Denise was lying. Denatti, not as

strong as Revella, was more active. Twice, realizing that Revella's purpose was to bend him backward over the table, he whirled away.

Whirling, raging, fighting, they struck one of the stone pillars. Denatti's right shoulder bore the unexpected weight and shock. The sword flew from his hand, struck the table top, and slid to the floor on the other side. Revella followed it like a hound leaping a fence. He landed on his hands and feet within a foot of the sword, grasped it, and got up gloating.

But Denatti had sped to the knife, and when Revella again faced about, Denatti, with the knife in hand, was retreating toward the front door, evidently meditating flight.

He had no opportunity to open the door, for Revella was after him, and Denatti was forced along the wall toward the door that opened in the west wall of the room—the door through which Fallon had first seen Denise.

This door was closed, also.

It opened inward.

The two men were moving about, cat-footed, noiseless—Denatti backing away, Revella following. They had passed the hinged side of the door and Revella was crowding Denatti into the recess formed by the corner of the fireplace when the door creaked and began to open—swinging out into the room so that Denatti and Revella were behind it.

Dusk had come. There was now barely enough light in the room for the enemies to see each other's faces, or to see Denise, lying motionless on the table.

Denatti and Revella stood motionless, waiting. The

door opened slowly until it stood straight out into the room. Then a man appeared, stood for an instant looking at Denise, and leaped to her side.

The man was Fallon.

He bent over Denise, whispered her name. In that position he felt a sword's point pressing into his side just above the hip. He turned his head and saw Revella standing behind him. Denatti, knife in hand, was closing the door through which Fallon had entered the room.

Chapter XXVIII

THE appearance of a common enemy had brought a temporary truce between Revella and Denatti. Revella, now certain that it had been Fallon who had killed Mortwell and the two Crees, was eager to take revenge, and he stiffened his muscles to drive the sword blade through Fallon's body. But Denatti, having a grudge to pay, wished to participate in the murder, and so he danced forward, knife in hand, calling upon Revella to withhold the thrust. Reluctantly Revella obeyed, though he did not remove the sword's point from Fallon's side.

Denatti, coming close, deftly plucked the pistol from the holster at Fallon's hip, backed away, placed the weapon on the table out of Fallon's reach, and faced Fallon, to bow and smile at him.

"So Monsieur Fallon did not go away after all," he said coldly. "Monsieur Fallon has stayed to permit Denatti to repay him for that blow."

Fallon had kept his word to Denise and had returned to her room through the shaft at the time appointed, only to find Denise gone and the hall door ajar. He had been in the heavy undergrowth near the entrance to the tunnel half an hour before, and from there he had seen some white men in the Cree village. Assuming that there was no one in the house with the exception of Denise, who had probably gone down to the kitchen to order food from Mowaki, he had decided to explore the

rooms. He had gone into several, and then he had entered the big room, to find himself trapped.

He had heard no sound; he did not know that Denatti and Revella had been fighting over Denise. Yet Denise was lying on the big table, unconscious, and Denatti and Revella were in the room with her. From her pallor, which was accentuated by the deepening dusk, he judged she had fainted. When he had first reached her side, not knowing that anyone was in the room with her, the shock of seeing her in that position had bewildered him. But when he had felt the point of the sword at his side and had turned his head to see the two men in the room with him, comprehension came instantly. And with the comprehension came rage.

His gaze rested momentarily upon the revolver that Denatti had taken from him. Denatti observed the glance, darted quickly to the table, snapped open the cylinder, tossed the cartridges upon the floor, and hurled the weapon into a corner.

That digression from his original purpose almost lost Denatti his advantage. For Fallon, turning quickly, evaded the thrust of Revella's sword and struck with savage force at Revella's jaw. The blow missed Revella's face and struck his shoulder; and Revella staggered, fell, and slid along the floor to a point between the table and the front door—the sword trailing and clanging after him.

Denatti had rushed as Fallon struck, hoping to be able to strike from behind. But Fallon, lighter on his feet than either of the two, had turned and was bounding toward Denatti before Revella had ceased to slide. Although armed with the long knife, Denatti had not

the courage to face the charge of the man he had called "clodhopper." He turned, leaped behind the stone pillar nearest him.

Like a huge cat, Fallon was after him.

Denatti knew the possession of the knife would avail him little if Fallon caught him. For Denatti now began to gain some conception of the strength and elasticity of the muscles of the man who was after him. The great arms were swinging at his sides, balancing him as he leaped here and there in pursuit; the hands gripping the backs of chairs and hurling them out of the way with as much ease as if they were made of paper, and reaching for Denatti as the latter desperately and ineffectively slashed at them with the knife.

Half a dozen times Denatti was forced to leap over the table to escape. The table was wide, and even in the frenzy of fear that had seized him, lending him unusual strength and agility, he was compelled to rest a hand upon the top in order to get over, while Fallon leaped cleanly.

Revella had got to his feet, and with the sword in hand he now went to Denatti's aid. The two stood side by side, Denatti with the knife and Revella with the sword, and Fallon was forced to halt. He stood before them, crouching, seeking a point of attack, following Revella's sword point as it weaved and circled.

They could not use their weapons upon Fallon, for Fallon was quicker than the movement of Denatti's arm, and the point of the sword did not touch him. Yet Fallon could not stand or charge, for now while Revella forced him from the front Denatti was attempting to slip around him to attack him from the rear.

Fallon had to prevent that, and so he began to back away, circling around, keeping out of the corners.

It seemed that the two men were afraid of him. If both would attack simultaneously they would be almost certain of victory. But they did not. They followed him, always menacing him, backing him slowly around the room, attempting to crowd him into a corner. Meanwhile, being confident that sooner or later they would force him into a position from which there would be no escape, they taunted him. But Fallon, silent, grim, watchful, did not answer them.

Twice around the room they circled. The light held, but it was slowly going. The faces of the men were still visible to Fallon, and the light from the windows gleamed upon their weapons and upon the great sea chest at the east wall of the room, with its wide bands of brass. A shaft of light reflected from some object outside the house shone upon Denise, revealing her face with cameolike sharpness. The white light of the north, shimmering brightly and lasting long after the coming of darkness, created a subdued, pearly glow in the room.

Circling the room once more, Fallon suddenly leaped the table, leaving the two men in the open space toward the fireplace. Fallon reached for a heavy earthen jug in the center of the table. Divining his purpose, Revella lunged at him with the sword. But, laughing derisively, Fallon gripped the jug, danced backward, then forward, and hurled the jug at Revella. It struck Revella in the chest. He staggered, coughed. His knees sagged. But he recovered quickly and came on again, cursing.

Revella moved west along the table, while Denatti went east. Fallon waited until they had rounded the

ends and were coming toward him. Then he leaped over the table. As he went over, poised in mid air, Denatti threw the knife. It whizzed past Fallon, missing his throat by inches, and struck the door through which Fallon had entered the room, sticking there, point first.

Fallon leaped for Denatti. But Denatti scurried out of his reach on the other side of the table, threw himself upon the knife that was sticking in the door, jerked it out, and turned to face Fallon at the instant that Revella, following, came up.

Fallon had hurled himself at Denatti so swiftly that when the latter drew the knife from the door Fallon was forced to veer in his course to keep from crashing into the knife. He slid into the corner between the fireplace and the west door, and before he could turn, to leap again, Revella was upon him, forcing him back.

They had him now. In a corner. They were facing him, moving slowly toward him, and he crouched low, meditating a rush upon Revella and hoping to fend a sword thrust with an arm. If he could do that he would close with Revella, knock him down, wrench the sword from his hand and finish Denatti.

Watching the men, weaving his body back and forth in an effort to induce Revella to lunge at him, he saw the lid of the great sea chest rising. Rising with it were two brawny reddish-brown arms, a head crowned with black hair, and a pair of mighty shoulders.

Wattanooka!

Fallon gave no sign to indicate that he had seen his friend. But the hard lines of his lips twitched into derisive curves as he continued to weave and sway his body in an effort to lure Revella into making a wild

thrust. But they were sure of him now, and were closing slowly and carefully, making certain that this time he would not escape them.

Their backs were toward Wattanooka. The giant savage had stepped out of the chest and was advancing swiftly but cautiously. The huge belt-ax was in his right hand, its rawhide handle loop encircling his wrist. In the semi-darkness he appeared to be of monstrous size.

He stole upon the two men noiselessly. When he was within a step of Revella he stopped.

Denatti saw him. He straightened, stiffened, tried to cry out. But his voice caught in his throat and his eyes widened with horror. Fallon struck him—a full, sweeping swing. The fist caught him on the point of the jaw and lifted him upward and backward. Into the shadows he crashed, his knife dropping to the floor at Fallon's feet.

There had been no sound from Revella; and no sword thrust. Swiftly Fallon turned. Wattanooka had seized Revella from behind.

Revella was still facing Fallon. Wattanooka's right hand, the belt-ax dangling from the wrist, was clamped upon Revella's right arm at the elbow. Revella's arm and the sword were sticking straight down so that the point of the weapon touched the floor. And the Indian's left arm was around Revella's neck. It was so big that it covered Revella's neck from chin to chest, and there was just enough pressure in its mighty muscles to hold Revella powerless to move.

Revella did not move. Out of the corners of his eyes he could see the big, reddish-brown arm, and he must have known now that what had happened to Mortwell and the two Crees was to happen to him.

Fallon had no pity for him; he merited what he was to receive.

Leaping to Denise's side, Fallon bent over her. She had not fainted, as he had thought, for her breath was coming regularly and slowly, as in deep sleep. She had been drugged. Fallon's hand lingered on her forehead.

Turning again, he saw Revella's face.

Wattanooka had wheeled Revella around so that now the man faced him. The Indian's hands were gripping Revella's arms at the biceps. He had swung Revella from the floor and was holding him at arm's length. Revella's legs were dangling inertly. He was like a toy suspended from a string. His eyes were round with terror.

The sword had dropped from his nerveless fingers. He was looking straight into Wattanooka's eyes, and he knew that his doom was upon him. Under the spell of the scene, fascinated by the strangeness of the tragedy that was about to be enacted, Fallon stood motionless beside Denise, watching.

"Me Wattanooka," said the Indian.

Revella only stared.

"Ugh," grunted the Indian. "You know um, eh?"

A shudder ran over Revella.

"You Revella," continued Wattanooka. "You burn Adam Hammond with firebrand. You cut um with knife—make um talk. No talk—you kill um. You stick spear in Wattanooka. Come time—now. Break um neck."

Revella screamed.

Fallon moved to where Denatti had fallen. He bent over the man and found that he was dead. Whether from the blow or the fall, Fallon could not tell. And he

had no time to waste with Denatti; for the front door burst open and one of the halberdiers leaped in. He had evidently heard Revella's scream.

He saw what was happening to Revella, and he lunged forward, thrusting at Wattanooka with the sharp head of the halberd. The thrust was never completed for again Fallon struck, leaping upon the halberdier from behind the half-open door. The halberd clattered to the floor and the man went down with it. He got up, staggering, and reached for a knife in his belt, under the foolish baldric. Fallon was measuring him for another blow when Wattanooka went past him like a giant shadow. The big belt-ax gleamed in the dying light.

The man's companion had entered the door, shoving the awkward halberd ahead of him. He saw what had happened to his friend, and he turned to escape. The halberd caught crossways in the door. He lunged against it and rebounded almost in Wattanooka's arms. The belt-ax gleamed again.

Wattanooka kicked the halberd out of the way and closed the door. Both Wattanooka and Fallon, motionless for an instant following the fall of the second halberdier, observed a dozen canoes drawing up to the landing at the foot of the slope. In the canoes were white men. Two other white men were crossing the river at the shallow where Fallon had crossed on the night of his arrival at the stone house. The light was not strong, and yet it was reflected strongly enough from the water to permit Fallon to see the faces of the men. They were Kelso and Blandin. The other men, he decided, were the white men Randall had sent for, the ruffians he had recruited for the raid upon Mercie Valley.

Chapter XXIX

WATTANOOKA closed the door. There was no word spoken. He restored the ax to his belt, stood erect, and gazed about him with somber interest. The two halberdiers were lying between the big table and the front door. Over near the west wall, near where Fallon's pack had been, was Denatti. Revella, his head queerly twisted, was lying on his back in front of the fireplace. Denatti's knife was lying on the floor near the west door, where he had dropped it when Fallon had hit him. Fallon had picked up the cartridges that Denatti had scattered, and was now examining the weapon itself, which he had found in a corner. He was twirling the cylinder and testing the action. Then he loaded the weapon and slipped it into its holster. When Fallon finished he saw Wattanooka standing beside Denise.

"She hurt?" asked Wattanooka.

"Drugged."

"What you mean?"

"Revella give her big medicine. Maybe Denatti. Bring sleep."

"Ugh." Wattanooka nodded his head toward the river. "White men come. You see. Stranger in canoe. Blandin. What do—fight um?"

"No. We'll get Denise away from here first."

"Good." He looked at Denise, stepped toward her,

then looked at Fallon. "You carry," he added. "Come."

He went to the sea chest. It was now so dark that Fallon could not see his face, only the dim outline of his body, but he heard his short laugh.

"Box got no bottom. Wattanooka in tunnel. Find iron ladder. Come up. Now go down. Shut lid of box. No open from top."

Fallon descended, first passing Denise to Wattanooka. Then the Indian again ascended, fastened the lid of the chest, and rejoined the two.

The passage they had entered ran at right angles from the main passage. Wattanooka lit a pine torch that he had brought with him when he had found the tunnel that led to the sea chest, and now he entered the main tunnel and lighted the way for Fallon.

They took Denise to her room and laid her upon her bed. She was still breathing slowly and regularly and gave no signs of approaching consciousness.

While Fallon was covering her with the quilts Wattanooka was at one of the windows listening, and when Fallon finished with Denise he joined him.

"Cree down there," Wattanooka informed Fallon. "Many. Many white man. Blandin. 'Fraid. No go in house. What you do?"

"We'll try to find Underhill," said Fallon.

"Ugh. Have to find pretty soon. Too many white men."

Fallon barred the door of Denise's room; then wrote a note to her telling her what had happened and advising her that if any danger threatened her from the hallway she should descend the shaft to the tunnel, where he and Wattanooka planned to continue their search for the

missing Underhill. Then he and the Indian descended.

The big house was silent. Out in front, where the Crees and the white men were congregated, there was whispering. The Crees were there out of curiosity, for they had watched the coming of the white men. But they were silent and nervous and they cast apprehensive glances toward the darkened windows of the house.

Blandin had been the first of the white men to reach the door, and Kelso was standing behind him when he knocked heavily upon it. Killen, Atkins, and Eccles, accompanying the Crees from the village, had joined the men from the coast. They had seen and recognized Blandin and Kelso, and after having spoken to the others they joined the two at the door. There, whispering, lest they disturb Randall, they told Blandin what had happened. And Blandin, impotently raging, cursed Fallon. He had expected Fallon would arrive first. But there had been no help for it. They had had to take Jackwoon back to Rossville. Jackwoon had nearly died. They had left Blanche Devake at Rossville.

Standing there in the dusk, Blandin was told of what had happened after Fallon's appearance at the stone house. And when he learned that Lin Underhill had been secreted by Randall and could not be found his rage was so great that the white men near him stood silent and stared at the ground, while the Crees shrank back, muttering.

"It's a damn lie!" he cursed. "Randall wouldn't double-cross me like that. It's Fallon. He knows where Underhill is. I'll find him and tear him apart!"

He opened the big door—the inner door—and shoved it back so violently that the glass rattled. He stood for

an instant in the doorway, outlined to the watching men—a big man, heavily muscled, representing raw, primitive force and the violent impulses of a beast. His big shoulders, his deep chest, his massive arms and legs made him appear shorter than he really was.

He was confronted by a wall of blackness. A match flared in his hand and he held it above his head to peer into the room. The white men behind him, and the Crees, overcoming their apprehensions, pressed against the doorway. They heard Blandin draw his breath sharply. The match wavered and went out. Some of the Crees had seen what the flickering blaze of the match had disclosed, and they fled, gibbering, to the foot of the slope. The men from the coast, clustered around the doorway, stood silent, waiting.

Blandin lit another match. The staring eyes in the doorway saw—first, the two halberdiers, their heads split open by the belt-ax, lying in the darkening pools that were slowly spreading; they saw Denatti, lying flat on his back; they saw Revella's body, and his head, grotesquely twisted, the horrified eyes staring at them.

The match in Blandin's hand went out. And now came that breathless and shuddering pause which follows the discovery of tragedy grim and awful. And in that instant, when the nerves of the men were tingling and jerking, there came a terrific clanking as of a sword sheath being hurled with frightful velocity down a flight of stone stairs; the sounds of furniture being tossed and tumbled about; the crashing and tinkling of broken glass; the banging of doors. And above it all came a wild, high shriek of Gargantuan laughter, toneless and flat,

carrying with it no mirth or joy or triumph, nor any sound that would express emotion of any kind. It came again immediately, changing its timbre so that in it could be detected a slight wailing. Again and again it came, filling the house, bursting forth through the windows and floating into the dark forest, reverberating, echoing. Then the clanking came again, down the stairs, at the east door of the big room. Behind him Blandin heard the sounds of running, as the men who had been near the doorway fled down the slope. He closed the door, slammed it shut, and followed the men. The Indians had vanished in the darkness, but the white men were grouped at the wharf, and when Blandin joined them they whispered, questioning him.

"It's Randall," he answered; "he's crazy as a loon!"

Chapter XXX

FOR a time, following Revella's departure, Randall was rigid. His hands had ceased beating the quilts, his legs had stopped jerking. His one eye stared fixedly at the ceiling. A paralysis seemed to have seized him. It had appeared to the others, but not to Meeson, that Randall was not aware of what was transpiring in his presence. That was because, having only one eye and no control of his facial muscles, his expression was blank. But Randall's senses were alert, and he heard everything. However, he did not hear with the mind of reason, for reason had fled. The blow that had broken his skull had affected his brain. Yet reason, always struggling, would not let in the total darkness of complete insanity; there were rays of light, flashes of consciousness and of reason, that absorbed the words he overheard and rendered them partially intelligible. The fiery, whirling chaos in which his mind was groping would not permit him to separate fact from fancy, the real from the unreal. It was a malady of peculiar phases. It wiped out the present entirely and sent his mind skittering back into the past. He was again on the quarter deck of the *Terror*, sailing the Seven Seas. The faces that appeared before him were the faces of his crew, of captives, of men he had condemned, of cronies of the old days. Things were jumbled, of course. For example, there was Meeson. Meeson.

The ship's doctor. And Revella, and Denatti, and Goodhull, and the Jap. All before him at the same time. He was puzzled. It was all right for him to see Meeson, but Denatti and Revella and Goodhull and the Jap had never been on his ship together, or ever. And yet here they were. And Denise. Denise had been on his ship. But only as a child. He couldn't get it straight. Denise shouldn't be here. Meeson was talking about strychnine—about giving him a shot of strychnine. Meeson meant to kill him. Damn Meeson! He reached for his pistol. It was not in his belt. His cutlass. Not there. Meeson suddenly faded from his vision and a smooth, green expanse of water loomed ahead. A merchantman, not more than half a dozen leagues off the port bow, was becalmed. A rich prize. The *Terror* was overhauling her fast. But they couldn't overhaul her. Days, weeks, months they kept after her. He raged at the crew. The men grinned at him. Meeson grinned at him. Revella stood, rage and impatience in his eyes, staring at him. Denatti's gaze was malicious. Revella again. And Denise. Denise standing near him, staring at him with horror in her eyes. Revella giving her something to drink—in a glass. Something that Meeson had given him. He tried to tell Denise not to drink it. He tried again to reach his pistol. Denise was in Revella's arms. Revella was carrying her away.

He strained; he fought to rise. Hours. Days.

He was up. Out of bed and staggering around the quarter deck. His strength was back. He shrieked and yelled in glee. He hurled a boot through a mirror. Hell! The world had gone topsy-turvy. A bed on a quarter deck. Chairs. A dresser. A table in place of a rail. He

hurled the table through a window. He lifted the dresser high and crashed it on the stone floor, wrecking it. He dressed, howling strange oaths. He took his heavy cutlass from a hook on the wall, drew it out of the scabbard. He belabored the bed with the empty scabbard, imagining he was breaking heads. Fully dressed now, even to boots and cap, he swung open the door. He ran down the hall, searching for Revella. Revella, who had made Denise drink something that Meeson had given him. He raged again. He hurled the empty scabbard down the stairs, and with naked cutlass in hand followed it. He lurched out into the big room. Dark. He found a match and lit the bracket lamp on the front wall, unaware of the fact that there were faces at the windows watching him. Blandin and the coast men. Eccles, Killen, and the others. He did not see them. But he saw Denatti and Revella and the two halberdiers on the floor. He stood over the halberdiers and laughed at them, telling them that he'd killed them because they hadn't obeyed orders. Then he was standing over Revella. The queer position of the man's head appeared to amuse him, and he roared with titanic laughter. But he did not touch Revella. His mood changed. He shrank from the body, muttering. All these dead men! They must have caught the merchantman. He did not remember the fight. Dead and wounded. He called loudly for Meeson. He raged, swinging his cutlass, when Meeson did not appear. He ran wildly into the east room in the dark, bumping against the walls, searching for Meeson. Up the stairs, along the hallway, he went, banging on the doors with the hilt of the cutlass, searching for Meeson and arousing his crew.

"Turn out, you swabs!" he yelled. "Turn out to repel boarders!"

While at the far eastward end of the hall he saw Meeson emerging from his door. There was a candle in Meeson's hands and the light revealed Meeson's face, which was ghastly white. He yelled when he saw Meeson, and began to careen down the hall toward him. The light went out; Meeson had dropped it.

Meeson knew Randall had gone insane. He had predicted it: had expected it.

Meeson scurried down the stairs. His intention was to get out of the house as quickly as he could. But he could make very little haste in the darkness, for he was fat and awkward. Randall almost caught him on the stairs, for Meeson could hear the cutlass scraping and clanging against the walls close behind him. He got through the big room with Randall so close that he did not have time to make for the front door. He went up the east stairway to the hallway. He was at the top of the stairs while Randall was at the bottom, and he found the door of Randall's room open. He hurried in, panting, and tried to drop the fastenings into place. He was nervous; his hands were shaking, and the bar missed the slot. Before he could lift the bar again the door burst open, throwing him back into the middle of the room.

It was very dark in the room, and the two men could not see each other. But Meeson's breath was coming in shrill gasps, and Randall could hear it. Meeson crawled under the bed. He heard the cutlass swishing over the spot he had just vacated, and as he crawled out on the other side he heard the *swish-swish* of the blade as it cut through the mattress in search of his body. He

dove for the doorway and felt the cutlass singing close to his head. He yelled in terror, threw himself at the head of the stairs, and tumbled down them, landing at the bottom with the breath knocked out of him. Down the stairs behind him roared Randall.

Meeson lurched out into the big room in the light from the bracket lamp. He was hurt. He knew he could not get to the door in time, and so he stooped, picked up Revella's sword, and faced the madman.

The watchers at the windows saw him lunge at Randall with the sword; they saw the big cutlass shatter the slender blade to fragments that rang and clattered upon the floor. And they saw the cutlass flash in gleaming half circles as Meeson was cut down, falling at last near Revella.

Then Randall paused. He turned slowly around and stared at the windows. His legs were spread far apart, his hands were hanging at his sides, the point of the cutlass touching the floor. The man's solitary eye was gleaming with a fierce wild light. His face was red, blotched with purple. The cords of his neck were bulged and knotty. He suddenly picked up an earthen jug from the table and hurled it with deadly aim at one of the windows, howling:

"Back to your quarters, you hellions!"

He roared when the faces vanished. Then he leaped to the door, threw it open, and ran outside, swinging the cutlass.

But the watchers had fled. In the outside darkness Randall could not see them. He stood cursing them.

Then he went back into the house and closed the door.

He strode through the house, giving orders to imaginary men. He called the members of his old crew by name. He was again at sea and the house was his ship. He captured a prize, transferred her stores to his own vessel, and sank her. He ordered the crew of the captured ship put to death, and he laughed and roared as two men were forced to walk the plank. Then, suddenly, he was talking to Denise.

He roamed through the house again, muttering. He was searching for Denise. He tried her door and found it locked from the inside. He begged for admittance, promising that if she would open the door he would tell her something. When he was not admitted he began to pound on the door with the hilt of the cutlass. And when that failed he began to rage again. He went down the stairs, crossed the big room, entered his own, and lifted the hearthstone from the fireplace. He hurled the stone out of one of the windows, and yelled with glee at the crashing of the glass. There was a shaft where the hearthstone had been, and he went down into it to the tunnel. He went up another shaft and entered the room adjoining Denise's. The door entering Denise's room was open, and he strode to the girl's bed and stood looking down at her. Sight of her seemed to calm him a little, and he talked to her, apparently not understanding that he received no answers.

He left her bedside and stood beside the shaft in the other room, staring into it. And as he stared his eye gleamed slyly. He laughed, went down the shaft, and began to walk through the main tunnel.

Chapter XXXI

FALLON and Wattanooka had separated. The Indian, in his secret prowling about the house—into Mowaki's kitchen and the storeroom, and even into the outbuildings at the rear—had found a short, heavy iron bar with a flat, sharp end; and with this, as Fallon left him, he began to prod and poke at the stones that lined the main tunnel. He had persistently insisted that Underhill would be found in one of the passages under the house, and he worked patiently to vindicate his judgment.

Fallon had gone outside, letting himself into the open through the river entrance to the passage. He was of the opinion that Randall had secreted Underhill somewhere in the timber, fearing that Denatti or Revella or the others might attempt to gain the information he had and use it for their own purposes.

Wattanooka, working in the main passage, had several times paused to listen to faint, strange noises that came from the floors above him. He knew that the white men from the coast had arrived, and, coincidentally, Blandin and Kelso, and at first he thought they had all entered the house. Naturally, finding the slain men in the big room, they would cause some commotion. Yet there was something in the noises that aroused Wattanooka's curiosity, and at last he moved along the

passage until he reached the small tunnel that led to the shaft under the sea chest. Climbing the ladder, he placed his head against the under side of the lid of the chest and listened.

Plainly he could hear Randall raging and raving. He heard the clang of metal, the crashing of glass. But he shrank when he finally realized that Randall was insane, for the superstitions of his race told him that a crazy man was one who was inspired and actuated by evil spirits. He wanted nothing to do with Randall, so he silently descended to the tunnel and resumed his work upon the walls.

He was working in the light of a pine torch that he had stuck in a crack in the rock floor; and suddenly, an hour or so later, he leaped upon the torch and stamped out the blaze, for he had heard someone coming down a distant shaft. He seized the torch, which was still smoking, and ran into an intersecting tunnel to hide until he learned the identity of the intruder. It might be Denise, though she had been sleeping soundly. It could not be Fallon, for Fallon was outside. It might be Randall, for Randall knew of the passages, having built them.

It was Randall.

He was entering the passage from the shaft that led to the room next to Denise's, and Wattanooka drew the ax from his belt. Superstition was strong in him, but he decided that if Randall was carrying Denise from her room he would kill him. For he knew that Fallon loved Denise.

Randall had a pine torch. He had taken it from a niche in the wall of the tunnel. He had them hidden

everywhere. He dropped heavily into the passage and stood under the shaft for a time, peering about. The rays from the torch penetrated the darkness for only a short distance, but Randall appeared to be satisfied for he finally went eastward, the torch held in front of him.

He was muttering. He stopped at every shaft and peered into it. He examined the entrance to every cross tunnel. Watching him intently, Wattanooka decided that his malady had passed the acute stage, and so, being now less apprehensive, Wattanooka followed. He kept out of the radius of the light rays and took advantage of every cross tunnel he came to, but Randall did not look back.

He paused at last far down the passage, and ran his torch along the rock wall as if searching for something. Then he placed a hand against the wall and leaned his weight against it. The hand disappeared to the elbow and beside it a rectangular section about four or five feet square swung slowly outward into the tunnel.

Wattanooka stared in amazement. The section was on hinges. The rocks that formed the wall were on a background of steel or iron, and were so cleverly fitted and matched that the outline of the door could not be detected except by a minute examination. Wattanooka was certain he had many times inspected that very section of the wall.

Randall shoved the door back so that it was against the wall of the tunnel. He propped it open with a rock that he picked up from the dark interior that was disclosed beyond the open door. He was so careful about placing the rock in position that Wattanooka got the

impression that the door could not be opened from the inside, and that Randall was making certain it would not accidentally close and imprison him.

Randall finally seemed satisfied. He stepped through the doorway, torch in hand. Wattanooka could hear his boot heels clattering on the rock floor.

Wattanooka leaped to the doorway and peered after Randall. The latter was walking slowly, swaying from side to side, like a bear. The torch he carried gleamed and flickered upon the ragged rock walls and ceiling of a passage that broadened like a wedge, the doorway being the narrowest point.

This, evidently, was a sort of storeroom. Boxes, bales, and barrels were strewn along the walls. There was a row of shelving, laden with small, fat canvas bags—bags of gunpowder. There were hundreds of them.

Randall did not appear to be interested in the stores. He opened a door that was cut into the wall at his left, pushed it back so that it would not close, and stepped into the opening. It was several seconds before Wattanooka ventured to approach the doorway, and when he did so he again saw Randall.

The man was standing near the center of a big cavern which was flooded with light that entered through iron bars covering an opening to the outside world. Willows, growing outside the bars, screened the entrance, and a shadow entering with the light indicated a rock wall or a hill close to the willows. There was a door in the entrance, chained and locked.

Randall had dropped the torch, for there was no need of its light here. Randall stood with his back to Wattanooka, and directly in front of Randall, sitting upon a

stool, his wrists in irons which were attached to the wall behind him by chains, was a young man instantly recognized by Wattanooka as Lin Underhill.

In Wattanooka's eyes Underhill had changed very little. He seemed to have lost no weight during his confinement, though his face bore a pallor that had replaced the healthy tan that Wattanooka knew. He was tall, lithe, with broad shoulders that sloped like an athlete's. His black hair was in disorder and dropped in long waves over his ears and the back of his neck; and a six months' growth of beard added to the wildness of his appearance. Yet Wattanooka knew him.

He did not see Wattanooka. He was watching Randall, steadily, inquiringly, fearlessly, and Wattanooka saw his muscles begin to tense as Randall reached into a pocket and drew out a key.

Randall swayed back and forth like a bear standing on its hind legs. The key, which was small, dangled between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. Wattanooka could not see his face, but he intently watched Randall, and he saw the young man's eyes begin to gleam with amazement and furtive hope. It appeared to Wattanooka that Underhill understood what had happened to Randall.

And now Randall spoke. His voice was hoarse and quavering with passion.

"You won't tell, eh?" he said. "You won't tell where Hammond's gold is hid? You claim you don't know anything about it. Hammond told you. But you say he didn't. You lying lubber! The gold is hid somewhere in the hold of this ship. You told Revella where to find it and he tried to get it without letting me know. But I

caught him. I caught him on the quarter deck and cut his throat. And that's what I'm going to do with you."

He dropped the key—he seemed to have forgotten it—and drew a knife. He had placed the cutlass on Denise's bed when he had been talking to her in her room, and in his wanderings about the house he had picked up the long knife that Denatti had dropped when Fallon had hit him.

Underhill leaped to his feet as Randall, crouching and muttering, moved toward him.

Wattanooka's rush was noiseless. Randall was within a few feet of Underhill when the giant savage gripped him from behind. Swiftly a big, reddish-brown arm slipped around Randall's neck, constricting with resistless force until the man's breath was shut off and his popping eyes stared at the ceiling. Wattanooka's right arm went over Randall's shoulder, holding it tightly against his side, while the big hand slipped down and grasped the wrist of the hand holding the knife.

There followed the strange rasping sound of the bodies of two strong men clenched in combat; the furious and breathless straining of strength pitted against strength, when muscles are tried to their utmost. Randall was a huge man, and heavy, but his feet slowly left the rock floor as his body was bent backward. The knife clanged, dropping from Randall's hand and sliding across the floor of the bars of the entrance, where it lay gleaming in the light. Randall threshed, fought to turn, but the iron arms that held him were rigid and unyielding. And yet, heaving mightily, with all the fury and strength that his malady gave him, he gained an inch. Wattanooka's arm slipped along his great bull-like neck. It stopped

at the chin and Randall's body grew limp. Still the Indian's arm held him. A minute, perhaps. Then the grip relaxed. Randall slumped to the floor. His face was mottled, the brutal lips were blue.

Wattanooka found the key that Randall had dropped, leaped to Underhill, and unlocked the manacles. The chains rattled against the rock wall, and Wattanooka and Underhill went through the open doorway into the storeroom.

In the storeroom they paused to grip hands, then went swiftly through the wedgelike passage to the main tunnel. Here Wattanooka found his pine torch, lit it, and closed the iron door.

"Shut um in," he said, thinking of Randall. "No kill um. Crazy."

He led Underhill through the main tunnel to the entrance at the edge of the river. There they found Fallon's pack. They climbed out of the entrance and for a few minutes they stood there, while Underhill gratefully drank the keen, fresh air of the open.

"No hurry," Wattanooka informed him. "You weak. Hungry. No get grub for long time. Huh?"

"I had plenty of food and water," answered Underhill. "They were brought to me by a Cree from the village. It was always the same one. I think he was the only one of the Indians who knew where Randall had taken me. I haven't suffered much. At first they were pretty rough with me. But that's nothing. Is Gail all right?"

"Gail well. Worry about you. Send Wattanooka and Fallon to find you."

"Fallon! Who is Fallon?"

"Big man. White man. Strong. Brave. You father send um to North country."

Wattanooka would say no more until they had traveled some miles southward, to the shelter that he and Fallon had prepared. There, stretched out on the bed of yielding branches that were like down to Underhill, Wattanooka related the story of Fallon's pilgrimage into the land. He also told Underhill more about Gail. And finally he recited the incidents that had occurred in the stone house.

Then Underhill again found the Indian's hand and gripped it hard.

"Ugh," grunted Wattanooka. "Me do little. Break neck two, three time, mebbe. Fallon smart. Strong. Kick with arm. Bust face off. Wattanooka's friend."

"Where is Fallon now?" asked Underhill. "I would like to thank him."

"Ugh," grunted the Indian. "Him come bimeby. Thunk um bring woman."

Underhill asked still other questions about Gail, and about Fallon. And in his strange but intelligible jargon Wattanooka answered them—and many others. He even related the incidents of his meeting with Fallon at the pool, where they had tested their strength, each with a subtle purpose in mind. And the tale as it came from the Indian's lips had an homeric flavor. It seemed to Underhill that except for these two strong, brave men—the white and the red—he must have died in the cave in which he had been found. Two ordinary men could not have rescued him, and he was certain that only Wattanooka could have overcome the huge Randall.

Chapter XXXII

THE scene that Blandin and the other white men had witnessed when they had stared through the windows of the big room had shaken their courage. Eccles and his companions, having been intimates of Denatti and Revella and the two halberdiers, had recognized them in the dim light from the bracket lamp, and they had seen what had happened to Meeson. They were accustomed to bloodshed, but the spectacle of the giant madman cutting Meeson to pieces had been too much for them and they fled to the banks of the river, where they stood huddled together, awed by the wild, weird screams and yells that came through the windows. When Randall threw the front door open and raged up and down on the granite slope the men were not able to conquer the fright that seized them. They fled down the river toward the Indian village, the coast men with them. The Indians had preceded them.

The white men were standing apart from the Indians. The coast men were silent, listening to Eccles, who told them what had happened. A shudder ran through them when Eccles related how men had been found with their necks broken. They had seen Revella, and Eccles supplied details about Mortwell and the Crees who had unfortunately met Wattanooka in the dark. Eccles was shivering with fright. He was leaving the accursed place before daylight. Everything had gone wrong. The Crees

were in a panic and could not be induced to go to Mercie Valley. They wanted nothing to do with "the Neck-breaker." He was the Nemesis that the contrary spirits had appointed to destroy them. They were going to flee northward to escape him. He had become a legendary monster. He was as tall as a tree and his ax was an arrow's length across the blade. He broke necks as easily as an ordinary man could snap a twig between his fingers. He had the power to change himself into various forms and he could go through doors as if doors were not there. How else could he have gotten into the stone house with all the doors closed and barred? How else could he get out when the doors were still barred in the mornings following his visits? Moreover, he was prowling around in the forest and no one knew when his giant arm would reach out from behind and seize one.

Revella and Denatti and Meeson were dead. Randall was crazy, and Meeson had said that he would never recover. By this time Underhill had starved to death.

While Eccles talked the Crees were putting out their fires and preparing to break camp. The white men from the coast, only half believing the tale about Wattanooka, sullenly stood their ground. They wanted a look at the house in the daylight; they were not to be frightened by a crazy man. They went into camp, though they posted sentries as a precautionary measure.

Eccles and his two friends, Killen and Atkins, and the Japanese, Mowaki, stole to the landing, embarked in canoes, and started down the river toward the coast.

Blandin, who had been silent, watched them go.

Blandin had his own opinion about what had happened. He knew Wattanooka and he knew Fallon, and

he surmised that the two had met and had come to the stone house to search for Underhill. The Indian legends about Wattanooka were legends only. Wattanooka was a big man, to be sure, but he was not supernatural and a bullet would bring him down as quickly as it would bring down an ordinary man. As for Fallon, a bullet, rightly placed, would finish him also. And Blandin was eager to speed such a bullet, for he still remembered the terrible beating he had received that night on the steamer.

Also, there was rioting in Blandin's veins a lust for the gold in Mercie Valley, and there burned in him the hot desire of a man for a woman. He had seen Denise several times and her disdainful manner toward him had merely inflamed him the more. He was not sure that Underhill had starved to death. There was a chance that Randall—crazy as he was—would recover. Denise was still in the house, for during the excitement he had quietly questioned Eccles about her.

So he had stood quietly with the other men, listening, feeling a deep contempt for their cowardice, never for an instant harboring a furtive impulse toward panic.

Alone, he strode away from the group of white men. He went down along the river bank and stood for a long time in the darkness, watching the great, gloomy house. Kelso, evidently also afraid, did not follow him but stayed with the white men in the camp.

Except for the yellow, flickering light in the big room where Revella and Denatti and the others were lying, the house was dark. For many hours Blandin stood at the foot of the granite slope, listening. He could distinctly hear Randall's wild screams and yells. Several

times he was able to follow Randall's wanderings through the house by the light of the torch the crazy man carried. He grinned contemptuously when Randall hurled various objects through the windows; and there were times when Randall's muttering became intelligible to him. Randall was crazy, there was no doubt of that.

Toward morning Randall's voice was heard no more, and presently Blandin began to steal up the slope toward the house. He opened the front door, stepped inside, and listened. He heard no sound and was now convinced that Randall's ragings had exhausted him. He stood for a time looking at the dead men that were strewn all over the room, and then he crossed the big room and went up the east stairway.

He knew where Randall's room was located, and when he shoved the door open the first gray streaks of dawn were coming in at the windows and he was able to see that Randall was not in his bed. He smiled wryly at the wreck of the room, stepped back into the hallway, and went down it, trying doors that were closed and peering into rooms whose doors were open.

Daylight had come by the time he got downstairs again, and when he reached the big room he blew out the bracket lamp. His rage was deep, for his plans had gone awry, but his lust and greed were great and he entertained no thought of defeat. Nor did he fear Fallon or Wattanooka. Fallon had bested him once, it was true, but that had been because he had been surprised and unprepared, and Fallon's first blow had deadened his senses. When he met Fallon again he would square things with him. If he could find Randall he would tie

him up against the time when his malady would permit him to talk rationally, then he would find Underhill and torture the truth out of him. And even if he did not find Underhill he would go to Mercie Valley and find the gold. He would first kill Wattanooka, and then he would be able to recruit a force of Crees to help him to dispose of the Indians in the valley. He would stay in the big house: he would become its master. And Denise would stay here with him.

Such were his thoughts as he climbed the west stairway and went along the hall.

He saw that Meeson's door was open, and he looked into the room. He tried all the doors and found all of them closed. He knew where Denise slept and so when he reached the door to her room he placed an ear against it and listened. He could hear her breathing, and he smiled and stealthily tried the door. He went down the stairs again, crossed the big room, and went up the east stairs, for he had observed that the hearthstone in Randall's room was missing, and he suspected that perhaps through it he might solve the riddle of the mysterious movements of Wattanooka in the house, as told him by Eccles.

It was now broad day, and when Blandin stood over the mouth of the shaft under the fireplace he could see the iron rungs of the ladder. He laughed gleefully and went down the shaft, to drop lightly to the stone floor of the tunnel.

He found a pine torch that someone had dropped, and he lit it and stood there holding it above his head while he gazed about him. He wasn't greatly interested in the system of passages. It was clever of Randall to

conceive them, and his brief examination led him to believe that most of them were natural, but there would be time later to examine them more closely. He had no doubt that Randall was down here—sleeping off his exhaustion probably—and that Underhill would be found here.

There was time. He was alone. None of the white men would enter the house, and the Crees were moving northward.

Lighting his way with the torch, he saw the various shafts. He climbed them one after the other, shoving the hearthstone aside and looking into the rooms. And then he climbed one where the hearthstone had already been removed, and he rested in the opening, listening to the breathing of someone in the room adjoining. He smiled, swung himself out of the shaft, and cautiously stepped to the communicating door. He saw Denise lying on the bed where Fallon had placed her.

Chapter XXXIII

DAY had come when Fallon returned to the mouth of the tunnel, after having spent the night prowling about the country in the vicinity of the house searching for Underhill. He slipped into the entrance, closed it, and lit a pine torch from a supply that Wattanooka had found. In the light from the blazing pine his face was grim. He was beginning to believe that Underhill would never be found—that Randall had killed him. He had no thought of giving up the search, for he had promised the elder Underhill to find Lin, dead or alive, and he would keep on searching until he succeeded. Yet there was a problem to be solved even while he continued his search for Underhill. The problem was to get Denise away, where she would be safe from the band of murderers that inhabited the house, and from Blandin and the other white men he had seen at the landing. He could take her to Mercie Valley, but he would have to accompany her on the trip, and during his absence he would have to give up his search for Underhill. He was certain she would not agree to go to Mercie Valley with Wattanooka, for the Indian was a stranger and she was afraid of him.

While he walked from the entrance to the shaft that led to the room next to Denise's he decided. He would take Denise from the house. If she was still under the influence of the drug that had been given her, he would carry her to the shelter Wattanooka had built, wait there

with her until she recovered, and then take her to Mercie Valley. Wattanooka could stay near the stone house and continue the search for Underhill. He could make the trip to the valley and back in seven or eight days.

Sight of Blandin had aroused Fallon. Occasionally in his wanderings he had met men whom he had hated. Usually he had avoided them. On the wharf at Grand Marias he had recognized Blandin as an enemy. Hatred, which may be provoked by a glance, had surged through him there. He had not tried to account for it. It may have been born by Blandin's manner, by something in his appearance. But now, having learned from Denise that Blandin had boldly sought her, and knowing that at last Blandin had come to the stone house, he was gripped by a cold rage that drained the blood from his face.

He climbed the shaft, stepped out of it, and moved lightly to the door that opened into Denise's room.

He saw Blandin standing at the bedside, looking down at Denise, who had regained consciousness and was staring up at the intruder with startled, incredulous fright and horror. She seemed to lack the power to move or cry out, for she was motionless, and no sound came from her open lips.

Blandin's back was toward Fallon. And Fallon stood silent, watching.

Blandin's revolver was in his right hand. He tossed it upon the bed. It dropped beside Randall's cutlass—where Randall had put the weapon down when he had been insanelly talking to the girl. And now Blandin laughed, and bent over Denise to speak to her. He must have seen something in the girl's eyes that warned

him of a presence behind him, for he turned swiftly, saw Fallon, and lunged for the gun or the cutlass—one or the other.

He got neither. There was no time. For he had to turn to meet Fallon's rush, to dodge the terrific blow that started for him with all the force of Fallon's rage behind it. The fist grazed the top of his head as he evaded it, but he was not prepared for the sudden impact of Fallon's weight, and both men went down in a threshing blot, over in a corner near a window, into a wreck of furniture that crashed and clattered around them.

Appalled, shocked out of the coma into which the drug had sent her, but still breathless and speechless, Denise sat up and stared at the raging men.

They rolled over and over, taking the furniture with them. They rose and fought near the wreck of Denise's dressing table, and Blandin toppled over it to land upon his shoulders with his heavy muscular legs sticking straight into the air. He seemed impervious to injury. His bulging thighs and arms and shoulders were sheathed with flesh that seemed like rubber, for he rebounded from falls that might have broken the bones of an ordinary man, and plunged into Fallon with the fury of a beast deprived of its kill.

Fallon also appeared not to feel the bumps and blows. The furniture might have been made of papier-mâché. It cracked and crashed under their weight and was threshed and churned under their rolling bodies until the room seemed to be filled with débris.

The sounds went through an open window of the room and carried to the Indian village, where they were heard by the white men who were camped there. The

men ran to the foot of the slope near the landing and stood there listening, although they could see nothing. They thought, perhaps, that the noise was made by Randall, in his madman's antics; and they did not approach the house, but stood there, silent and awed.

Fallon might have drawn the gun whose stock stuck out of the holster at his side. He did not think of it. The cold fury that seethed in him was concentrated in an effort to beat and maim the hated face that ducked and dodged in front of him; that at times was laid on his shoulder as they wrestled here and there, striving, straining for advantage.

Blandin, broad, shorter than Fallon, was astonishingly light on his feet; and somewhere, doubtless in other fights in which he had engaged, he had learned the art of slipping and ducking blows. For he was as elusive as a shadow, and Fallon had trouble hitting him. Not once so far had Fallon been able to land a solid punch, although he had started many. They had glanced off Blandin's head and chin, or had gone around Blandin's neck as he stepped forward. In the clinches Blandin would brace his stocky legs, rest his head against Fallon's chest, and shove forward, driving terrific blows with both hands.

There was no word spoken. Crouching on the bed, Denise watched the set faces and the blazing eyes of the two men and knew that this was to be a battle that would not end until one of the fighters was dead. She winced as Blandin drove in blows that would have shivered a plank, but when she saw that they had no apparent effect upon Fallon she felt a fierce, wild exultation.

For five, ten, fifteen minutes they fought, seemingly upon even terms, though Blandin had landed the greater number of blows. But now Denise sensed a change. Blandin was fighting as furiously as ever, and it seemed there would be no end to his terrific energy, no wearying of the tough muscles that propelled him here and there with a rapidity that baffled Fallon.

It was Fallon who had brought about the change. At first his rage had made him too eager. Now he had control of himself. He was measuring his blows; he was coldly calculating distance. Twice his fists had reached Blandin's head with the vicious snap and jar that tells of perfect timing, and Blandin's knees sagged. Again, lunging forward with his head down, Blandin ran into an uppercut that snapped his head back and sent him reeling to the wall. Fallon was after him swiftly. Blandin was badly hurt, but he roared with rage, bounced forward with his head down, and drove himself like a battering ram into Fallon's stomach. Fallon staggered. His face turned ashen. His legs doubled under him; he went to one knee and his chin sank to his chest as Blandin launched a furious kick at him. Blandin was too eager. The boot went over Fallon's head, and he was up, gripping Blandin around the waist in an effort to hang on until the pain left him. Blandin, fighting now with demoniac fury, fought to shake Fallon off, and again they careened around the room in the *débris*.

Blandin shook himself loose, stepped back, and came in again, to be met with a terrific punch that stopped him in his tracks. He came on again, blinking, trying to shake off the mantle of fog that had suddenly enveloped him, striving to get close so that he could clinch with Fallon.

The men had forgotten Denise; they did not even glance at her; it seemed they were oblivious to their surroundings, to the room, to the wreck and ruin they had wrought, to the débris through which they plunged in their efforts to beat and maim each other. Blandin had become a beast; he had reverted to type; he was an atavism. Cornered in this room, with a man he knew was his equal if not his superior, given no chance to get at the gun he had carelessly thrown upon the bed, forced to fight with only the weapons that Nature had given him, he was a brute in the last extremity, and he muttered and whined and mewed insanely as he drove forward, swinging his fists.

Locked together, they swayed around the room. They went down in a corner and rolled over and over to the center, to rise and separate as though by prearrangement, to meet again with a crash as Fallon's fist met Blandin's jaw. Blandin went down, but was up again instantly. Blood was streaming down his face. His lips were lacerated, there were big purple bruises on his cheeks; his nose was awry—broken, it seemed. But still he kept coming, getting up from the floor after each knockdown and launching himself like a projectile at his enemy. Fallon's blows, accurately placed, driven with appalling force, had no apparent effect upon him. He shook his head as if to clear his brain, and came in again.

Denise was on her knees on the bed, breathlessly watching, her body swaying as her tensed nerves reacted sympathetically to Fallon's movements. At first she had anticipated an easy victory for Fallon, but as the fight went on and she saw that his blows had little

effect upon Blandin she began to fear that Blandin would win. She had knelt there, clasping her hands, desperately and frenziedly twining and untwining her fingers. But now, realizing that perhaps Fallon would not win, she got the gun that Blandin had tossed upon the bed, cocked it and held it with both hands and waited. If Blandin won she would shoot him.

Outside, creeping slowly up the slope, crowding closer, spurred by curiosity to learn the identity of the fighters in the room, the coast men several times saw Blandin and Fallon as they fought close to the windows. One window was wide open and through it went the sound of the wrecked furniture being kicked out of the way by the raging men; through the window went Blandin's voice as he whined and cursed and muttered. The men saw Blandin's face, smashed, but still recognizable to those who knew him; they saw Fallon's face, grim, cold, determined. And now, knowing that it was not the crazy Randall who was creating the din, some of the men darted toward the front door. Denise had not seen them enter the house, but she heard them in the hallway. Knowing nothing of the secret entrances or of the tunnels under the house, the men were at the doors, trying to open them, but not succeeding because of the heavy fastenings. The men who had stayed outside had crowded still closer. They were shouting encouragement to Blandin.

However, they could not help Blandin. The fight was almost over. Twice, coldly measuring the distance, Fallon had knocked Blandin down.

Blandin was staggering. His bull-like strength was deserting him and his recuperative power was on the

wane. Getting up from the second knockdown, he stood for an instant swaying, his eyes blinking. But he surged forward again, into a swishing fist that struck his jaw with a sound like that of an ax splitting a log. His legs bent at the knees, his body twisted so that he bent forward from the hips. He went to his hands and knees and rested there, swaying from side to side. Then he got up slowly and backed away from Fallon.

He knew the end had come. It seemed he was mutely signaling surrender. Then suddenly he leaped for the cutlass on the bed. His right hand was within an inch of the handle when Fallon, stirred to a sudden furious rage, struck him again. Blandin went down without a sound. For a moment Fallon stood watching him, listening. He heard the coast men at the door; he could hear the others outside the house. He stooped over Blandin, seized him by the shoulder and a leg, and swung him slowly over his head. Then, in much the same manner he had employed in the rock-throwing contest with Wattanooka, he threw Blandin out of the open window, watched him land on his head in the midst of the coast men, and then turned to Denise.

She sprang to meet him, knowing the danger of delaying. They went down the shaft in the next room, through the main tunnel to the entrance, crossed the river at the point where the Cree had hurled the spear at Fallon, and entered the dark forest that began at the water's edge. There Fallon found a game trail that he and Wattanooka had used. Denise was trembling. He faced her, drew her to him and held her tightly for a moment. Then, lifting her to his shoulder, he ran southward, toward the shelter that Wattanooka had built.

Chapter XXXIV

A FEW minutes after Wattanooka and Lin Underhill had left the cavern Randall began to twist and squirm. Slowly the dark color stole from his face, to be succeeded by an ashen pallor. Still unconscious, he clawed at his neck, where the Indian's great arm had been. He rolled his head from side to side, fighting his way back to life, for he had been near death. He was not aware of his narrow escape, and when at last he opened his eyes and stared at the ceiling of the cavern he had no recollection of what had happened to him. In his imagination he was still on the deck of his ship, and when he finally sat up, gasping for breath, he was trying to shout orders to his crew. He was suffering from weird and bloody hallucinations; his malady still created strange and fantastic visions. He got to his feet and staggered out of the cave and into the storeroom, bellowing hoarsely. But that phase passed, and at about the time Blandin was going through the tunnel in search of a shaft that would lead him to Denise's room, Randall was standing before the powder shelves in the storeroom slyly cackling. He was now in the hold of the ship. What had he gone into the hold for? To sink the ship, of course—to blow it up. A brig of war—a British ship of the Line—had crippled him. It had hung close to him all day, riddling him. Now it was coming closer, to board him. Nearly all his crew had been killed.

What the Englishman wanted was to capture him, to take him to England in irons, then to hang him. Damned if he'd surrender! They'd all go down together. Sure. That was what he had come down for—to blow up the ship. Sure. There was the powder, right in front of him. Powder and fuses. Tons of powder and miles of fuses.

He filled his arms with sacks of the powder and coils of fuses and ran to the door that opened into the main passage. Wattanooka had thought the door could not be opened from the inside, but Randall fumbled at it an instant and swung it ajar. He propped it open and ran down the main tunnel to one that intersected. He stayed in it for a time, packing the bags of powder away. He ran back to the storeroom after more bags of the explosive, and when he was satisfied with what he had done he ran a fuse into the intersecting tunnel and stretched it down the main tunnel. He ran here and there into other intersecting tunnels, carrying bags of powder and stringing fuses. He seemed to have a comprehensive plan. Perhaps in the months and years before insanity came he had planned this act, rehearsing it over and over mentally until he had it complete, until every detail had been thought out. But whether or not he had previously planned it, there was no hesitation in his manner, no stopping to ponder what the next step should be. He ran hither and there like a hound on the scent, packing the fat bags into places that he alone knew, carefully stowing them into every section of the subterranean system, cleverly running the fuses where the dampness would not impair them, fondling them, chuckling over them. When he had stowed more than half the bags in the tunnels he climbed the shaft that

led to the sea chest in the big room and placed a number of the bags in the various rooms, running a separate system of fuses to the sea chest. He packed the powder with earth and stone, in closets and in secret apertures, until he had it scattered all over the house, above and below.

Several times he heard sounds that brought him to a pause to listen. A rending and a crashing upstairs; voices outside. He peered out of a window and saw the coast men congregated at the bottom of the slope. They were all staring up and their faces were set. He saw a body hurtle down, to strike the granite of the slope head foremost, and he laughed in high glee at the spectacle. He saw some of the men running toward the front door and he dove headlong into the sea chest and then popped his head out under the lowered lid to watch them as they charged through the big room to reach the upper floor. Not one of them had seen the fuses that were cunningly strung along the floor in the corners. He howled as he applied a match to the fuses, and when they fizzed and sputtered, and the white, acrid smoke began to run along the floor, following the white, sizzling sparks that ran along the various fuse lines, he bellowed hilariously, clambered down the ladder under the sea chest, and ran to the storeroom. There, bending over the ends of the fuses he had laid in the subterranean passages, lighted match in hand, he heard the dull boom of an explosion upstairs. The air around him rocked; the rumble shook the rock floor under him. There came another explosion, and another. There was a crash on the floor above him, and a roar just above his head. He

danced up and down, yelling delightedly. The match he was holding went out. He lit another and bent again to light the fuses at his feet. They caught. Fiery serpents crawled and wriggled away from him. They went out of the door of the storeroom and into the main tunnel. Some of them went east, others went west. He stood in the doorway of the storeroom and watched them. Here and there one of them went north and another south into the intersecting tunnels, and into cleverly concealed hidden passages. He leaned against the door jamb and laughed until he began to choke. He heard a terrific bombing all around him—like thunder above his head. There was a continual crashing, as of beams falling. These sounds were all muffled. He waited, and at last there was a detonation in the tunnel that caught him, lifted him, and hurled him far back into the storeroom. It threw him flat and he tried to rise, to howl the glee that sought expression. He was hurled back again as another blast smote him.

The rock walls around him began to split asunder. Through a bluish white smoke that swirled and eddied around him he saw great crevices in the walls and ceilings. The shelves in the storeroom toppled over and fell upon him. He kicked them out of the way and tried to get up. But something was wrong with him. He could not rise. He was on his back and he could not even turn over. A paralysis had seized him. He tried to twist and squirm so that he could get his hands and feet under him. But he could not move.

The thundering continued. He heard the crunching of rock sliding and settling, a groaning, a peculiar sigh-

ing, like the wind in the trees. He saw the ceiling above him part and crumble. Great blocks of rock slipped down and struck near him with terrific thudding sounds. The big end of the cavern collapsed, the walls slipped inward, toward him.

Chapter XXXV

TWO days in the forest, and two others spent traveling slowly over the barren, rocky wilderness that stretched between Mercie Valley and the scene of the final tragedy at the great stone house, brought Denise and Fallon and Lin Underhill and Wattanooka to the edge of the labyrinth of rock that concealed the valley from the outside world.

There had been no pursuit, for there had been none to pursue. Denise and Fallon had reached Wattanooka's shelter and had been told of Underhill's rescue when the sound of the first booming explosion reached them, and they had listened until the last one came and the quivering air again became heavy with its brooding silence. Then Wattanooka told them about Randall and the bags of powder, and about the malady that had overtaken Randall.

Fallon and Wattanooka went back to the edge of the forest close to the river, leaving Denise and Underhill at the shelter, for they feared that the coast men, led by Eccles and the others, might be trailing them. But when they gazed up the slope to the eminence upon which the stone house had stood, they knew there would be no trailing done by the coast men. For the great house had fallen. It was now only a flattened pile of stone and beams, bearing no resemblance to anything that man had constructed. Here and there upon the pile

of débris were the torn and mangled bodies of men. A faint, blue smoke spiraled here and there from the rocks.

The Cree village was deserted. Lashed to the little landing at the foot of the granite slope were many canoes—empty. The binnacle had been overthrown. It had slid to the bottom of the slope and its polished brass glittered in the sunlight. Already the primeval wilderness was reverting to the somber silence which had reigned over it until Lumly Randall and his band had broken it. For now there were no sounds from the house. Lumly Randall had come to disturb the peace of this solitude, and now peace had again returned. Only the twittering of birds and the slow, steady sweep of a gently sighing breeze from the south broke the silence.

At the shelter Denise listened, dry-eyed, to the description of the ruin that had overtaken the stone house. She slipped into Fallon's arms and stood, holding him tightly. And at this minute Fallon said nothing to her.

It was later, after they had spent a week in Mercie Valley, and were on their way down the river toward the secret entrance through which Fallon had first penetrated the Hammond domain, that Denise spoke a thought that had been troubling her.

Wattanooka had insisted upon accompanying them to Rossville. Lin Underhill was not going out for another month, but Fallon was bearing a message to the elder Underhill, which would be telegraphed from Grand Marias. In the party with Denise and Fallon were Wattanooka and another Indian, to carry the luggage and to make the camps. They were traveling slowly, and the wilderness was smiling under a summer sun. The long stretches of smooth water in the rivers and

lakes made a gently undulating pathway for their canoes, and the green of the forests provided their beds for the nights.

Fallon's canoe was foremost. He wielded the paddle, and during the daylight hours Denise sat facing him, watching him. Wattanooka and the other Indian were always several hundred yards behind.

Denise was watching the water as it rippled in graceful swells away from the bow of the canoe. She was blushing, but her eyes were serene under their drooping lids.

"Ah, Monsieur Jim," she almost whispered, "you are a very determined man. You know that Lumly Randall died without revealing my identity. Yet you would marry me—a nameless girl."

"I am not going to marry a name. I want you, name or no name."

Silence came. Denise broke it, saying: "Jim, do you remember that day in my room in the stone house when you leaned over me when I was sitting in the chair?"

"I remember every second I have passed with you."

"And do you remember what you said then?"

"Yes."

"Will you say it again?"

"A thousand times. It was: 'Denise, you are my woman.'"

"It is the same," she smiled.

There was silence again, and the canoe entered a patch of shade, where the surface of the water was like a mirror with a shadow upon it.

And then Denise looked at Fallon steadily.

"Jim," she said, "I am sorry. I mocked you that day, and while I was mocking you I wanted to cry. I did not

want to love you until I knew there could never be any doubt in your mind that you loved me. Yet if you had asked me I should have answered that you are my man. Jim, I knew it from the first time I saw you."

The canoe lingered in the patch of shade. Far down the river Wattanooka observed that the leading canoe was motionless, idly drifting with the lazy current; so he headed the prow of his own craft into some willows that fringed the bank, and motioned to the other Indian to join him.

THE END

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